



SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION OF HEARING AND DEAF YOUTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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SYTUACJA SOCJOEKONOMICZNA MŁODZIEŻY SŁYSZĄCEJ I MŁODZIEŻY NIESŁYSZĄCEJ PODCZAS PANDEMII COVID-19

Słowa kluczowe: sytuacja socjoekonomiczna, młodzież słysząca, młodzież niesłysząca, pandemia COVID-19

Streszczenie. Artykuł ma charakter empiryczny. Celem badań było uzyskanie odpowiedzi na pytanie, jak postrzega swoją sytuację socjoekonomiczną podczas pandemii COVID-19 młodzież słysząca i niesłysząca. W badaniu wzięła udział młodzież słysząca (98 osób – 65,3%) i młodzież niesłysząca (52 osoby – 34,7%). Przedmiotem badań był status społeczno-ekonomiczny rodzin młodzieży objętej badaniami. Badania miały charakter eksploracyjny. Jako metodę badań zastosowano sondaż diagnostyczny z elementami techniki ankiety. Ponadto wykorzystano autorskie narzędzie badawcze: kwestionariusz ankiety przygotowany do zbierania danych w formie online. Analiza materiału empirycznego pozwoliła na poznanie wiedzy i opinii młodzieży na temat tych kryteriów, które decydują o ocenie sytuacji socjoekonomicznej rodziny podczas pandemii COVID-19. W części podsumowującej przedstawiono wnioski dla praktyki pedagogicznej.

Keywords: socioeconomic situation, hearing youth, deaf youth, COVID-19 pandemic

Abstract. The paper is empirical in nature. The aim of the study was to answer the question, 'How do hearing and deaf young people perceive their socioeconomic situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?' Hearing adolescents (98 participants – 65.3%) and deaf adolescents (52 participants – 34.7%) participated in the study. The subject of the research was the socio-economic status of the families of the young people covered by the study. The research

was exploratory in nature. A diagnostic survey with elements of questionnaire technique was used as a research method. Moreover, an original survey tool was used, i.e. a survey questionnaire prepared to collect data online. The analysis of the empirical material made it possible to learn about the knowledge and opinions of adolescents on those criteria that determine the assessment of the socioeconomic situation of the family during the COVID-19 pandemic. The concluding section presents conclusions for pedagogical practice.

Introduction

Over the last century, unexpected outbreaks of epidemics and pandemics have caused great social unrest, but have also enabled rapid medical response and their quenching (it is worth recalling the Spanish flu of 1919 which claimed almost one hundred million victims, as well as SARS of 2002, the bird flu of 2003, the swine flu of 2009 or the Ebola epidemic of 2013; Aassve et al., 2020). The coronavirus pandemic surprised with the rate and extent of the spread of viral outbreaks around the world. At the beginning of March 2020, the mobility restrictions were a completely new experience, but people tried to find ways to respond to the virus in order to demonstrate that they could overcome such sudden impediments that threatened their quality of life. However, as the virus spread and the restrictions increased, feelings of helplessness (Lifshin, Mikulincer, 2020), intolerance and uncertainty (Çelik, Kose 2021) grew. Although attempts were made to determine the consequences of a hitherto unknown and rather life-threatening condition, it was not expected that the present cataclysm would have such massive, collective and widespread effects. On every continent, the inhabitants became participants in the same scenarios imposed by COVID-19. Already in March 2020, the inhabitants of the global village quite commonly manifested the surprise syndrome, defined by Wolf Lepenies (1997) as a set of symptoms in which one knows something, but at the same time does not believe it. Initially, the emphasis was on the primary consequences relating to the virus, i.e. the high probability of becoming infected and experiencing its negative health effects including an increased risk of death. However, fairly quickly, secondary consequences, which were the same for everyone, also emerged, such as the need to take precautions and adhere to restrictions on civil liberties, which led to a halt in the development of social and social life (cf. Dąbkowska, 2020; Panayiotou et al., 2021; Sigler et al., 2021). It turned out that the pandemic caused not only a public health crisis, but affected other spheres of social life at a very rapid pace. Another consequence was a political

crisis, global economic collapse, and the resulting disrupted social order. There occurred a universal 'Kaufmann's game break' which even became a new social norm, but within in the space of the break human life is still going on (after: Drozdowski et al., 2020). It is in this situation that man tried to find other areas of competition, interaction or self-exploration. Despite the limitations and obstacles, a natural manifestation of adapting to the new conditions was to find a way of using time appropriately and performing activities that give pleasure to man, e.g. home-made catering or spa, improving remote working or perfecting techniques of not getting out of bed (cf. Drozdowski et al., 2020; Güzel et al., 2020). The strategies that are adopted to cope with this situation and the experiencing of positive emotions were facilitated by several protective factors, such as social support, humour, sport, sharing thoughts and feelings about COVID-19 with others, and perceiving the usefulness of the constrictions (Armour et al., 2020; Bischetti et al., 2021; Golemis et al., 2022; Marchetti et al., 2022). Research by Simon Lloyd D. Restubog et al. (2020) has shown that emotion regulation is an adaptive way to cope with lifestyle changes caused by a pandemic, as it can reduce negative psychological states and enhance coping strategies used to improve mental well-being. It is important that mutual responsibility and empathy, which are required for social balance, are also not forgotten in the pandemic situation.

It is possible to identify the social groups that have statistically suffered most in the pandemic (Liem et al., 2020). These include young people as those who strongly experienced social distancing and deprivation of freedom, something that even became a generation defining event for them. The order to stay at home and the new experience of changing lifestyles have affected their mental health and reduced their physical and cognitive activity. However, the generation of 'digital natives' surprisingly easily succumbed to social isolation. At the same time, this is and will be the social group coping most effectively in the world of technology because 'life online' is not a problem for young people from generation Z (Gambin et al., 2020; Goldberstein et al., 2020). Generation Z consists of people born in the years 1995–2010. In addition, they are referred to by names such as generation M (*Multitasking*), generation C (*Connected Generation*) or net generation (*Permanently connected* – generation Z). This is also the generation referred to as generation C, it is also defined by psychological characteristics, such as attitudes, values, and lifestyle. These are people open to new technologies, unable to imagine everyday life without them. The main characteristics of people from generation C include: the desire to have influence and control, creativity, communicativeness, number of contacts with other people (connection).

C in the name of the generation is also developed with such features as: connected (being in the network, contacts), content-centric (central meaning of content), computerized (being computerized), community-oriented and always clicking (Friedrich et al., 2011, p. 4). It can be assumed that the above personality predispositions helped them in social adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many authors noticed the negative consequences of the pandemic for the Z generation, because they occurred during their adolescence, the formation of their views and life aspirations (Field, 2021; Kutwa, 2021). Subsequent restrictions in social life interrupted the continuity of the influence of groups and institutions, so important for the Z generation. Young people experienced numerous limitations, especially the possibility of undertaking activities and tasks appropriate for this developmental period (e.g. shaping identity, building peer relationships, including intimate ones). The assessments of the effectiveness of remote education made by experts (which was their reality for the last year) were ambiguous, with indications of rather low effectiveness (Czarnecka, Żelazkowska, 2021; Karaśkiewicz, 2021). Despite these worrying analyses, it emerged that Gen Z youth 'can be resilient and recover quickly from disasters like the pandemic. However, their experiences and the burden of long-term, multiple stressors (including: previous trauma, illness, broken ties, sadness, isolation, closed borders, confinement at home) can result in a number of challenges to their mental health and well-being, both in the short and long term' (Rider et al., 2021, p. 1).

Research methodology

The aim of the study was to answer the question, 'How do hearing and deaf young people perceive their socioeconomic situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?' The surveys were conducted from September to October 2021 among hearing adolescents (98 secondary school pupils, which is 65.3%) and deaf adolescents (52 secondary school pupils, which is 34.7%). The subject of the research was the socioeconomic status of the families of the young people covered by the study. The research method was a diagnostic survey with elements of questionnaire technique. Moreover, an original survey tool was used, i.e. a questionnaire prepared to collect data online. It is worth noting that the present research was exploratory in nature. The study sample was purposively selected based on the following criteria:

- general education secondary school pupils;
- pre-adulthood stage, i.e. middle adolescence, between 17 and 19 years of age (the middle adolescent age is a period of making important life decisions, the beginning of the implementation of plans related to the future, acquiring an occupation and plans for personal life);
- place of residence in the present Mazowieckie Province.

Hearing young people were represented by pupils from mainstream schools, while deaf young people were represented by pupils from special schools (40 secondary school pupils, 77%) and mainstream schools (12 secondary school pupils, 23%). All respondents in this group described themselves as 'deaf'. Other factors differentiating between hearing and deaf adolescents were sex and place of residence. According to the analysis that was conducted, there were more females among the respondents (67 hearing female secondary school pupils, 68.4%, 36 deaf female secondary school pupils, 70%) than males (31 hearing male secondary school pupils, 31.6%, 16 deaf male secondary school pupils, 30%). Interpretation of the data on the place of residence of the adolescents showed a slight variation. The vast majority of the young people live in a provincial city (70 hearing secondary school pupils, 71.5%, 27 deaf secondary school pupils, 52%). The remaining group consists of those living in a city with more than 100,000 inhabitants (15 hearing secondary school pupils, 15.5%, 11 deaf secondary school pupils, 21%) and a city with less than 100,000 inhabitants (8 hearing secondary school pupils, 8%, 8 deaf secondary school pupils, 15%); and the smallest number live in rural areas (5 hearing secondary school pupils, 5%, 6 deaf secondary school pupils, 12%). The research is consistent with the assumptions of social research methodology. Non-probabilistic selection. Deliberate random sampling was used. Such sample selection is permitted by a group that is difficult to access, such as for deaf students, especially during a pandemic. The sample was large considering 52 deaf adolescents – the hard-to-reach group and the pandemic lockdown.

Results

An essential aim of the study was to learn the opinions of both hearing and deaf young people on the social status of their families. According to Zbigniew Kwieciński (2002, p. 32–33), a family status can be divided into three categories, taking into account such criteria as the nature of work, professional position, level of education, and type of place of residence. High-status families were those

in which the parents had higher education or were employed in managerial positions, or owned their own enterprises, and additionally their professional position enabled them to provide the family with an income higher than average, and lived in a large city. In the group of families classified as medium-status there were parents who had at least secondary education, were employed in white collar jobs, in services or as skilled workers employed as a technician or foreman, providing the family with average income, and lived a large city or a small town. The low status comprised those parents who had vocational or primary education, were blue-collar workers or farmers, and their income was low. A detailed analysis of the data showed that in the group of hearing adolescents the social status of the parents differed slightly. The medium status comprised 45 families (46%) with 31 families in the high status group (32%) and 22 families with low status (22%). The group of deaf adolescents was dominated by parents with medium status (24 families, 46%) and low status (23 families, 44%). The remaining 5 families (10%) were classified as high status.

Another factor that was examined was the economic position of the mother and father in the family in the opinion of hearing and deaf young people. The level of economic position represented by the parents was determined by their financial contribution to satisfying material needs in the family (Kwieciński, 2002). Financial resources obtained from the nature of professional work, providing very good material conditions and even allowing the family not to worry about the future, prove the high economic position of parents. Parents' average economic position indicates that there is enough in the family for basic material needs, but it is difficult to put aside additional money. Parents' low economic position was due to the fact that they do not always have enough money for regular fees and clothes or food; they cannot afford better food or clothes, and there are even months when they 'cannot make the ends meet' and then they have to save on everything. In both study groups, the majority were mothers and fathers classified as of average economic position (57% in the group of hearing secondary school pupils; 51% in the group of deaf secondary school pupils). Further analysis of the data collected from adolescents regarding their parents' high and low economic position showed that there were differences among the groups studied. In the group of hearing secondary school pupils, 28% of parents represented a high position and the remaining 15% of parents represented a low position. In the other group of deaf secondary school pupils, there were more fathers and mothers with a low position (31%) and fewer mothers and fathers with a high position (18%). It is worth emphasising that the opinions obtained

from the young people show that getting a proper occupation is very important for their functioning. In fact, occupation is for them primarily the source of income (98 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 49%, 50 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 36%) and satisfaction (50 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 24%, 15 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 11%). Furthermore, adolescents associated professional activity with benefits related to the opportunity to make social contacts (35 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 16%, 32 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 24%), a source of a sense of quality of life (20 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 9%, 15 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 11%) and a sense of identity (5 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 2%, 25 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 18%). Undoubtedly, professional activity that fosters personal development is very important in the process of normalising the lives of deaf young people, especially in their residential environment. Additionally, it is worth pointing out that the age of middle adolescence is a special period of development in which biological maturation processes are accompanied by natural crises leading to identity dilemmas, and is also a period for making important life decisions resulting from, among others, socioeconomic status (Kubacka-Jasiecka, Passowicz, 2014).

The analysis of the empirical material suggests that in both study groups the majority were families with one child (53 families in the group of hearing secondary school pupils, 54%; 29 families in the group of deaf secondary school pupils, 56%). Another 35 families in the group of hearing secondary school pupils (36%) and 18 families in the group of deaf secondary school pupils (35%) had two children, and the least numerous group was of families that had more than two children (10 families in the group of hearing secondary school pupils, 10%; 5 families in the group of deaf secondary school pupils, 9%). It is worth noting that the adolescents participating in the survey stressed the fact that their parents provide them with very good housing conditions as the vast majority have their own room (89 hearing secondary school pupils, 91%, 47 deaf secondary school pupils, 90%), and fewer adolescents share a room with a sibling or another family member (9 hearing secondary school pupils, 9%, 5 deaf secondary school pupils, 10%). The young people in the survey most often described their housing conditions as very good (53 hearing secondary school pupils, 54%, 21 deaf secondary school pupils, 40%), followed by good (36 hearing secondary school pupils, 37%, 20 deaf secondary school pupils, 38%). A significant minority of respondents

rated their housing conditions as unsatisfactory (9 hearing secondary school pupils, 9%, 11 deaf secondary school pupils, 22%). A detailed analysis shows that no survey participant described their housing conditions negatively, i.e. as bad or very bad.

The diagnostic study showed that the adolescents participating in the research tended to fill their free time with online activities in the COVID-19 pandemic situation. These included online gaming (73 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 20%, 49 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 20.2%), communicating via instant messaging, email or communication platforms (70 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 18.2%, 45 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 18.5%), browsing social networking sites (48 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 12.6%, 44 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 18.1%), surfing for entertainment (38 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 10%, 20 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 8.2%), searching for various information (21 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 5.5%, 15 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 6.1%) shopping (20 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 5.2%, 19 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 7.8%) or downloading software (12 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 3.1%, 10 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 4.2%). Other leisure activities mentioned in the home setting included watching films (29 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 7.6%, 8 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 3.2%), cooking (15 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 4%, 6 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 2.4%), and listening to music (14 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 3.6%, 2 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 0.8%). Unfortunately, the pandemic limited opportunities to meet with friends or acquaintances (8 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 2%, 4 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 1.7%), going to a disco (4 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 1%, 2 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 0.8%), shopping (4 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 1%, 4 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 1.7%), 'gadding about town' (5 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 1.3%, 2 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 0.8%), going to the cinema (4 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 1%, 2 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 0.8%), playing sports (2 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 0.5%, 2 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 0.8%), hiking or cycling (3 responses from hearing secondary school pupils,

0.7%, 2 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 0.8%), going to concerts (3 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 0.7%, 2 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 0.8%). On the other hand, a few respondents read books (2 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 0.5%, 1 response from a deaf secondary school pupil, 0.4%), or listen to the radio (2 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 0.5%). In the category of 'other' leisure activities, hearing young people gave one indication each of the following activities: playing an instrument, singing, lying in bed, and writing poetry, while deaf young people indicated the following activities: cleaning, playing cards, spending time with family, and studying.

The empirical analysis showed that before the COVID-19 pandemic more adolescents spent their holidays abroad (62 hearing secondary school pupils, 63.5%, 28 deaf secondary school pupils, 53.5%) than at home (36 hearing secondary school pupils, 36.5%, 24 deaf secondary school pupils, 46.5%). Despite the pandemic situation, they did not give up their holidays and spent their holidays mainly in Poland, specifically with family in the countryside (38 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 27%, 28 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 27%), at the seaside (24 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 17%, 10 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 9%), in the mountains (20 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 15%, 8 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 7%), by lakes (16 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 11%, 6 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 6%), and abroad (19 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 13%, 24 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 23%). Unfortunately, there were cases of people who did not go anywhere for a holiday (24 responses from hearing secondary school pupils, 17%, 29 responses from deaf secondary school pupils, 28%).

Conclusions

Hearing adolescents and deaf adolescents have an informed and critical perception of their family's socio-economic condition. The results of the present study show that there were no significant differences in the opinions of the two groups of youth about their socio-economic situation. It can be assumed that this is a result of the implementation of measures to equalize opportunities between these groups, and of better planning and elimination of any inequalities that emerge. The experience of equal opportunities in society by hearing and deaf young people can be a stimulating or motivating force for them to develop

their socio-economic status. The people participating in the research belong to the generation whose youth coincided with the times of exceptionally difficult social changes. However, their aspirations, education, and desire to achieve financial independence allow them to enter the logic of social changes. They have the potential for innovation, they have more energy, they are more open, critical towards the world, they cope in the world of information technology and thanks to this they try to overcome new challenges, in this case related to the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study was conducted in a special period, shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic reached Poland and introduced many restrictions in social life (including lockdown). It covered a relatively large group of intellectually deaf youth (52 persons) and a group of hearing youth matched in terms of age distribution, place of education and place of residence (98 persons). Thanks to this, information was collected on the perception of these young people about their socio-economic situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no doubt, however, that this study had a number of limitations. First of all, the deaf sample was not representative of the entire population, nor was the comparison group representative of the general population. The requirement of representativeness with regard to the group of deaf people is generally difficult to meet in research, because there is a lack of unambiguous data necessary to determine the demographic characteristics of this population. Deaf youth were qualified for the sample on the basis of the test person's declaration. In addition, contact with the respondents was made through the Polish Association of the Deaf, i.e. an organization working for the deaf, and groups of such people in social media, which could also increase the accuracy of the selection. The study was undoubtedly limited by the nature of the online survey, without direct contact with the participants. Despite these limitations, the collected information deserves attention and points to some specific aspects and determinants of the socio-economic status of hearing and deaf youth in a situation of pandemic threat.

Bearing in mind the nature and size of the sample, this diagnostic survey should be a contribution to the discussion on the importance of the socio-economic situation of hearing and deaf youth for their broadly understood functioning. The problem investigated here requires broader research, both in terms of the size of the study group and a multifaceted approach. Such research needs to be carried out for practical reasons. It is necessary not only from the point of view of the interest of particular individuals, but also from the point of view of the interest of the whole society because it involves consequences for social and economic

life and determines the relevant socio-economic decisions at the macro-system level. Therefore, an extremely important pedagogical proposition is to understand and explore not only the emotional, but also the social consequences of the functioning of young people in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic may become a kind of myth that will contribute to an early verification of what is and will be really important in the lives of young people. According to Danuta Waniek (2011, p. 12) 'in the culture of each society various myths are rooted, which have always referred to human emotions and feelings. In archaic societies they generally referred to phenomena describing the world, forces of nature, the nature of deities and their appearance in beliefs, customs and rituals. In modern societies, they have become a source of stereotypes and prejudices with ideological overtones'. The pandemic generation will have a chance to assess the condition of their own lives in the context of expected standards of well-being in life in order to better choose for themselves and ensure a higher level of socio-economic status. In the future, it is worth extending the topic with further research, including comparing the financial situation before, during and after the pandemic.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic is an experience that contains elements common to all people affected by it, but generational differences in perceiving it and its negative consequences should also be noted. For the young people participating in the research, the situation of the pandemic had and will have a reference not only to physical but also mental health. Undoubtedly, the pandemic is not indifferent to social functioning, and it can be assumed that in many cases it has left its mark on family life and educational aspirations as well as the socio-economic situation. Currently, it is difficult to answer the question of how much time young people need to regain life stability. There is a need for further analysis based on the diagnosis of the real needs of hearing and deaf youth, taking into account their potential and deficits. This is a socially important task, as it will enable the development of a complementary support program in various areas and levels of functioning, and thus reduce pandemic losses. In fact, with regard to all generations of young people (especially the generation Z), it seems reasonable to implement preventive measures aimed at protecting health and understanding the consequences of virus infection, but also the secondary effects of the pandemic. For young people, it is of particular importance to strengthen their social competences, enable the implementation of developmental tasks, as well as further education. These are important tasks for improving their socio-economic situation in the coming years.

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