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## Remote Work during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Organizations with a High Level of Interpersonal Interactions

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to show the premises and limitations resulting from remote work implementation in institutions providing direct psychological and pedagogical support services. The rank given to remote work issues in scientific studies, especially those focused on considering matters related to the broadly understood management of organizations, was also presented and the premises and limitations associated with making remote work real.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** A pilot diagnostic survey was conducted using a questionnaire developed by the authors of the present paper concerning the identification of the possibility of using remote work in psychological and educational counseling centers, especially in the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Findings:** Research proves that institutions with a high level of interpersonal interactions were not prepared to carry out tasks in the form of remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a relationship between the position held and the possibility of performing functions in the form of remote work. It is recognized that not all ICT tools used during a pandemic will be helpful after the pandemic ends.

**Practical Implications:** Organizations that before the Covid-19 pandemic carried out tasks through broadly understood interpersonal contacts should focus on a detailed analysis of their activities, focusing on those that can be carried out remotely. An important aspect is also providing employees with appropriate tools and training in their use. Acquiring the ability to use new technologies will allow specialists to avoid many difficulties.

**Originality/value:** The research results contribute to the discussion on the modification of working in institutions providing services with a high level of interpersonal interactions. The situation forced by epidemic conditions indicates new opportunities and solutions that can be used to improve the quality of work and increase its efficiency after the pandemic is over.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, remote work, organization management.

**JEL classification:** J81, M12.

**Paper Type:** Research article.

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## 1. Introduction

The 21st century is undoubtedly a time of both evolutionary and revolutionary changes taking place in the organization's environment and, consequently, in the organization itself. An important factor in these changes is global phenomena, such as the informatization of the economy and society and the related dynamic development of information and communication technologies, or the use of optical fibers to transmit information. This is accompanied by the increasing use of computers and the Internet both in so-called everyday life and, perhaps especially, at work.

As the impact of these factors (determinants) of change increases, existing structures and functions in traditionally organized entities for which work is provided are being remodeled. Many employees use computers, telephones and fax machines to perform their tasks away from where they traditionally would have to work. Therefore, the use of modern information and communication technologies provides conditions for departure from conventional solutions in the area of work organization by limiting direct contact between employees towards remote work, i.e. the work provided "at a distance", introducing independence of place and time from tasks to be performed (Cierniak-Emerych, 2006).

The related literature points out both advantages and disadvantages of remote working. On the one hand, the use of computer technology reduces employment costs and provides opportunities for the organization's development while offering employees greater freedom, autonomy, and professional experience (Bell, 2002). On the other hand, with deep-rooted attitudes to perceiving work in its traditional form, remote work tends to be viewed as a bad thing and should consequently become a short-term exception (Fenwick *et al.*, 2020). Against this background, it is also noted that employers decide to organize tasks through remote working if it is technically feasible (Pelletier and Thomas, 2018).

The interest in remote working has increased significantly, especially this year, due to the epidemic situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has led many governments to not only encourage, but even mandate the use of remote working as an alternative to closing businesses, and at the same time, as a way to reduce interpersonal relations during the pandemic. It should be noted that the process of implementing remote work is not without problems. Besides, the use of remote work should be viewed through the prism of the organization's specificity.

Against this background, considerations were made regarding the use of remote work in organizations where the main activity before the COVID-19 pandemic was based on direct contact with another human being. In this context, a specific group of entities is centers that provide psychological and pedagogical assistance. These institutions' importance and the demand for services provided by specialists working there increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. While reviewing the

literature on the subject, it was found that there are no considerations about the possibility of using remote work in such kind organizations. These institutions are assumed to carry out their activities based on direct contacts, so the implementation of remote work in them is associated with numerous changes related to the management of the facility, work organization, work time management, and ICT tools to implement tasks.

High proximity jobs are likely to undergo the most significant transformation after the COVID-19 pandemic. They will see the most extraordinary acceleration in automation and AI deployment, with knock-on effects in other areas of work (Lund *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, this study aimed to show the premises and limitations resulting from remote work implementation in institutions providing direct psychological and pedagogical support services. The rank given to the issues of remote work in scientific studies, especially those focused on considering matters related to the broadly understood management of organizations, was also presented and the premises and limitations associated with making remote work real.

## **2. Remote Working as an Area of Research Interest**

There are many definitions of the term remote working in the literature. For this study, we adopted the definition proposed by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) as of 05 June 2020, which states that remote work is work performed in whole or in part in an alternative workplace, can be performed in various possible locations that can be seen as an alternative to the place where the work could be expected, taking into account the profession and employment status.

In Polish law, the deadline for remote working appears with the publication of the Act of 2 March 2020 on special arrangements for preventing, counteracting, and combating COVID-19, other infectious diseases and crises caused by them. The Chapter 2 of the Art. 3. 1. of the Act states that an employer may instruct an employee to perform, for a fixed period, the work specified in the employment contract, outside the place of its permanent performing (remote work) (Sejm, 2020).

Another legal regulation concerning remote work is the Act of 24 July 2020 amending the Act on posting of employees to provide services and certain other acts (Journal of Laws, Pos. 374 as amended). It is amended as follows: Article 3(1) is replaced by the following: „1. During a state of epidemic threat or the state of epidemic declared due to COVID-19, and for 3 months after its cancellation, to counteract COVID-19, the employer may instruct the employee to perform, for a fixed period, the work specified in the contract of employment, outside the place of permanent work (remote work)” (Kancelaria Sejmu, 2020). The above changes in legal regulations confirm that the form of remote work, although known on the Polish labor market, is not well established in legal regulations and thus in the awareness of employees and employers.

When looking for an answer to the question about the importance of remote work and its use in enterprises, reference was made to scientific studies placed in the SCOPUS and Web of Science databases. Using the keywords “remote work”, it was found that the number of searched records in both databases indicates a rapid increase in the number of publications containing the keywords “remote work” in 2020, which is illustrated by the information contained in Table 1.

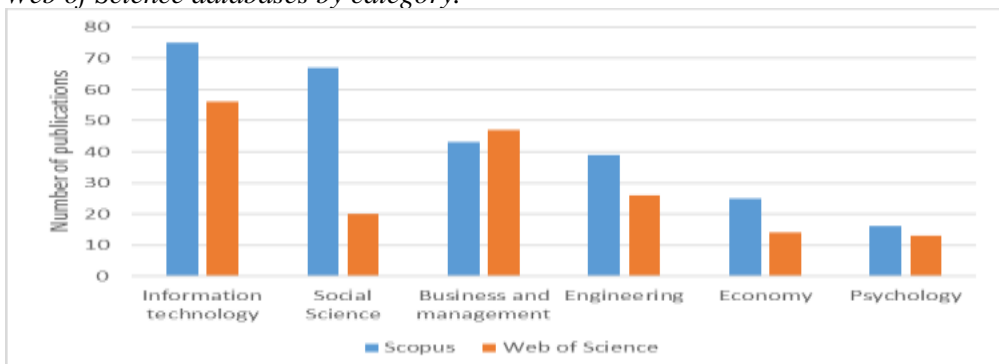
**Table 1.** Number of publications containing keyword {remote work} in SCOPUS database and (“remote work”) in Web of Science as of 15 October 2020.

Year of publication	Number of publications with keyword {remote work} searched in the SCOPUS database	Number of publications with keywords searched TS=(„remote work”) in the WEB OF SCIENCE database
2011	6	3
2012	12	6
2013	6	3
2014	10	6
2015	12	6
2016	19	13
2017	17	6
2018	20	17
2019	22	22
2020	88	61

*Source:* Author’s own elaboration.

At the same time, it was found that most of the articles can be found in sources in the field of computer science, social sciences and business and management, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Number of publications containing searched keywords in SCOPUS and Web of Science databases by category.



*Source:* Author’s own elaboration.

The largest number of articles in the Web of Science database was written in English (84.722%). The application of additional criteria in relation to the search records, in the form of elimination of non-English articles and those without public access,

yielded 13 articles in the Web of Science database on management issues, of which 11 were published in 2020. Applying the same criteria, the Scopus database returns 14 articles, 11 of which were also published in 2020. The above comparison allows for the assumption that the growing interest in the subject of remote work is undoubtedly due to the popularity of remote work on the labour market stimulated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This assumption is also confirmed by a small number of articles containing searched keywords before 2020. It is worth noting at this point the literature review on remote working published by Sliż (2020). The author classified the publications of Polish researchers, assigning their studies concerning remote work to separate areas of interest, distinguishing those that addressed the legal and psychological aspects, benefits and limitations of this form of work and the characteristics of tools supporting remote work.

On the other hand, the analysis of the foreign-language publications identified in the review leads to the conclusion that the opinions of researchers on the establishing the form of remote work in the employment market are divided (Leonardi, 2020). Some authors believe that after the COVID-19 pandemic, employees will return to their previous workplaces, while others believe that remote work will become the norm. In fact, it is impossible to predict for how long direct contact will be limited and thus how long the form of remote working will be a choice or a necessity. Researchers classified the occupations (Dingel and Neiman, 2020), demonstrating that 37% of jobs in the United States can be completely performed at home. The application of this classification of occupations in 85 different countries shows that countries with lower income economies offer fewer jobs with the possibility to do it at home (Dingel and Neiman, 2020).

It is worth noting that research carried out before 2020 showed that remote work was associated with a reduced level of work-family conflict (Felstead and Henseke, 2017). It is now emphasized that the use of this form of work in the COVID-19 era may exacerbate the conflict, which is for example, due to the need for additional childcare (Milliken *et al.*, 2020). The limitation of care services provided by nurseries, kindergartens and schools transfers this obligation to parents, which in turn affects the organization of their work. Furthermore, caring for elderly or sick family members can have a negative effect on career development and performance at home (Cho, 2020).

According to researchers (Milliken *et al.*, 2020), women are facing particular difficulties in this respect as most of them are responsible for the care of children (Nash and Churchill, 2020). This situation places men in a privileged position, thus leading to perceiving them as perfect workers, who are more efficient and committed, by not having to take care of children. However, research carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania revealed that the remote worker is the most satisfied employee. It turned out to be a woman with higher education, 4 to 10 years of job seniority, working in a managerial position. The least satisfied

employees were men with 20 years of job seniority who had taken the form of remote working during the quarantine period (Raišiene *et al.*, 2020).

Remote working, which, with the COVID-19 pandemic, has also become established in the public sector (Charbonneau and Doberstain, 2020), led to additional threats related to personal data protection, team management and employee productivity. The individual productivity of employees can vary considerably when working from home. This is related to the issue of supervising remote employees who, without the conventional management model, may perform their work less efficiently. This view reflects McGregor's assessment concerning the Theory X managers who assume that their employees do not like the work and will avoid it if possible (Hafermalz, 2020). Digital networks generate both opportunities and threats to employee autonomy (Brey, 1999), as the technology of remote working can be used to supervise the employee, raising concerns about this form of employment, whether or not these concerns are justified (Fairweather, 1999).

Chomałowska and Chłopek (2011) noted a similar trend. They emphasized that there is a common belief among many supervisors that an effective employee is an employee performing their duties at the employer's premises (office), with whom direct contact is possible and over whom direct control can be exercised. Unfortunately, in companies and organizations with no experience in remote working, such a stereotype of an employee who works less without supervision is often noticeable. This statement implies a conclusion about the need to develop a work model and a system of supervision in every company that employs workers in the form of remote work to properly fulfill employees' obligations and effectively manage the personnel.

The pandemic situation has led both employers and employees, not having enough time to prepare the appropriate tools and procedures, to learn to provide their services in the form of remote working. This situation also affected psychological and pedagogical counseling centres, which, before the pandemic, based all their activities on direct contact. Studies emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach to empirical research on remote working and human resource management in the digital economy (Donnelly and Johns, 2020) and the need to examine whether the principles, knowledge and attitudes developed in many companies and organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to be maintained after it ends (Cho, 2020).

### **3. Materials and Methods**

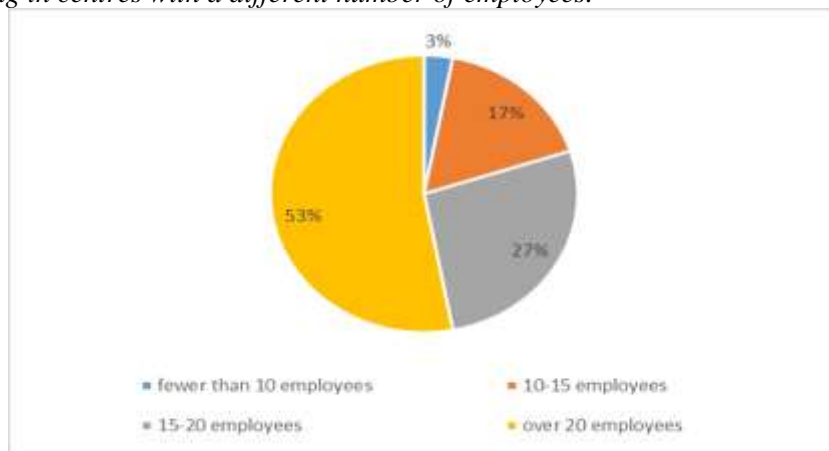
A pilot diagnostic survey was conducted using a questionnaire developed by the authors of the present paper concerning the identification of the possibility of using remote work in psychological and educational counseling centers, especially in the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the availability of information was the primary respondent selection criterion, the survey results should not be considered in terms of generalization of the related conclusions. They can only be applied to the indicated group of respondents. The undertaken empirical research concerned public psychological and pedagogical counseling centers and was carried out from 15 April 2020 to 3 May 2020. The CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) questionnaire was sent to 678 specialists from 33 public psychological and pedagogical counseling centers in Poland. The selection of the sample was based on the availability of email addresses on the institutions' websites. Research questions were formulated as follows:

1. Does the organisation's size affect the form of work carried out by employees during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Does the position hold affect the performance of tasks by the employee during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Does it take employees more, less or the same amount of time to perform their job duties as it did before the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. Is holding a given position associated with difficulties in the performance of professional tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What ICT tools are being used before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what tools can be used after it ends?

The study covered 98 specialists: 48 psychologists, 30 counselors, 15 speech therapists and five other specialists (two professional advisors, two psychotherapists, and a speech therapist-counselor). According to the information presented in Figure 2, most of the employees in the studied group of specialists were those working in the counseling centers employing over 20 people, constituting 53% of the respondents. The least numerous group (3%) was made up of specialists working in the institutions with less than ten employees.

**Figure 2.** *Percentage of the number of specialists participating in the survey working in centres with a different number of employees.*



**Source:** *Author's elaboration.*

The questionnaire contained 16 questions, 13 closed-ended and one open-ended question and two personal data questions concerning sociodemographic data of the people studied. A five-stage Likert scale was used in the study, and the values were described verbally and numerically: 5 - definitely yes; 4 - probably yes; 3 - neither yes nor no; 2 - probably no; 1 - definitely no.

*Statistical Methods:*

The non-parametric chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) (Więckowska, 2014) test based on numbers or frequencies was used to determine the statistical significance of differences between variables. The p-value, determined based on the value of statistics and  $\chi^2$  distribution, is compared with the significance level  $\alpha$ :

If  $p \leq \alpha \Rightarrow H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is adopted,  
if  $p > \alpha \Rightarrow$  there are no grounds to reject  $H_0$

Assuming that the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is the independence of variables (Francuz and Mackiewicz, 2007):

*$H_0$ : variables  $XX$  and  $YY$  are independent;*

*$H_1$ : variables  $XX$  and  $YY$  are not independent;*

*The level of significance is assumed to be  $p = 0.05$ .*

Pearson's linear correlation coefficient  $r_p$  (Więckowska, 2014) was used to study the strength of the linear relationship between the variables. It can be determined for the interval scale if the distribution of the variables studied is normal. The value of  $r_p \in < -1; 1 >$  is interpreted as follows:

- $r_p \approx 1$  means a strong positive linear relationship, i.e. measurement points are close to a straight line and the increase of the independent variable corresponds to the increase of the dependent variable;
- $r_p \approx -1$  means a strong negative linear dependence, i.e. measurement points are close to a straight line, but the increase in the independent variable corresponds to the decrease in the dependent variable;
- when the linear correlation coefficient takes a value equal to or very close to zero, then there is no linear relationship between the parameters studied (but a non-linear relationship may exist).

The test of significance for Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was used (Więckowska, 2014) to examine the strength of the monotonic relationship between the variables expressed on an ordinal or interval scale. The closer the value of  $r_s$  to 0, the weaker the monotonic relationship between the variables studied.

The value of  $r_s \in < -1; 1 >$  is interpreted as follows:

- $r_s \approx 1$  means a strong positive (increasing) monotonous relationship, i.e., the growth of the independent variable corresponds to the growth of the dependent variable;



- $r_s \approx -1$  means a strong negative (declining) monotonous relationship, i.e., the increase of the independent variable corresponds to the decrease of the dependent variable;
- when Spearman's rank correlation coefficient takes a value equal to or very close to zero, there is no monotonous relationship between the parameters studied.

The data analysis obtained in the surveys was carried out using the statistical PQStat software (test version) and Excel 2013.

#### 4. Remote Working in the Light of Empirical Research Results

When attempting to answer the first of the formulated research questions, it is worth referring to the information contained in Table 2. They indicate that negative answers (1) prevailed in all institutions, accounting for 83% of all responses. The performance of remote work was declared by the dominant positive answer (5) by 69% of respondents. The duty at the counseling center premises was confirmed by positive answers (5) and (4) by 58% of respondents. The combination of remote work and duty at the counseling center premises was reported by 73% of specialists providing answers (5) and (4). The form of work performed during the COVID-19 pandemic was related to the facility's size and (Table 2).

Employees of institutions employing more than 20 employees more often declared taking up remote work; employees of institutions employing less than ten employees more often declared performing duty at the counseling center premises. In total, remote work and duty at the institutions' premises were declared to the greatest extent by employees of the centers with 10 to 15 employees. A correlation between the organisations' size and the form of remote work  $p \leq \alpha$  ( $\alpha = 0.38251$ ) and a positive monotonic relationship between the variables studied were observed ( $r_s \approx 1$ ). However, no linear relationship was found between the compared variables ( $r_p \approx 0$ ).

**Table 2.** *Forms of work in facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic according to respondents (depending on the size of the facility).*

Counseling center size	Direct full-time work: values for mode 1: definitely not	Remote working: values for mode 5: definitely yes	Duties at the counseling center premises: values for modes 5-4		Remote work and duties at the counseling center premises: values for modes 5-4	
			definitely yes - rather yes		definitely yes - rather yes	
			5 (definitely yes)	4 (rather yes)	5 (definitely yes)	4 (rather yes)
percentage of answers [%]						
Over 20 employees n=52	85	75	35	13	48	17
15-20 employees n=26	88	62	38	23	65	19
10-15 employees n=17	71	65	35	29	71	6
Fewer than 10 emp. n=3	67	67	67	33	67	33

% of total (N=98)	83	69	39	19	57	16
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*Source: Author's elaboration.*

Next, the respondents were asked which tasks they were able to perform during the COVID-19 pandemic, trying to determine if there was a relationship between their position and the declared level of task performance. Following the data contained in Table 3, the respondents declared that they managed to implement the therapy (27%), organize consultations (57%), provide information about the student (57%) and participate in meetings of the multidisciplinary teams (40%). They definitely failed to make diagnoses (70%), provide teacher training (52%) and interventions at the student's home (67%). The greatest difficulty in making diagnoses was declared by counselors (74%), in the organization of training courses for teachers by other specialists (75%), and in the interventions at the student's home by psychologists (71%).

Based on data analysis in Table 3, it was concluded that the performance of a given task included in the teaching load depends on the position held. The statistical analysis confirmed the effect of the position taken on the performance of consultation tasks ( $p \leq \alpha$ ,  $\alpha = 0.4398$ ), providing information ( $p \leq \alpha$ ,  $\alpha = 0.8593$ ), and presence of a positive monotonic relationship between the variables studied ( $r_s \approx 1$ ); while no linear correlation was observed ( $r_p \approx 0$ ).

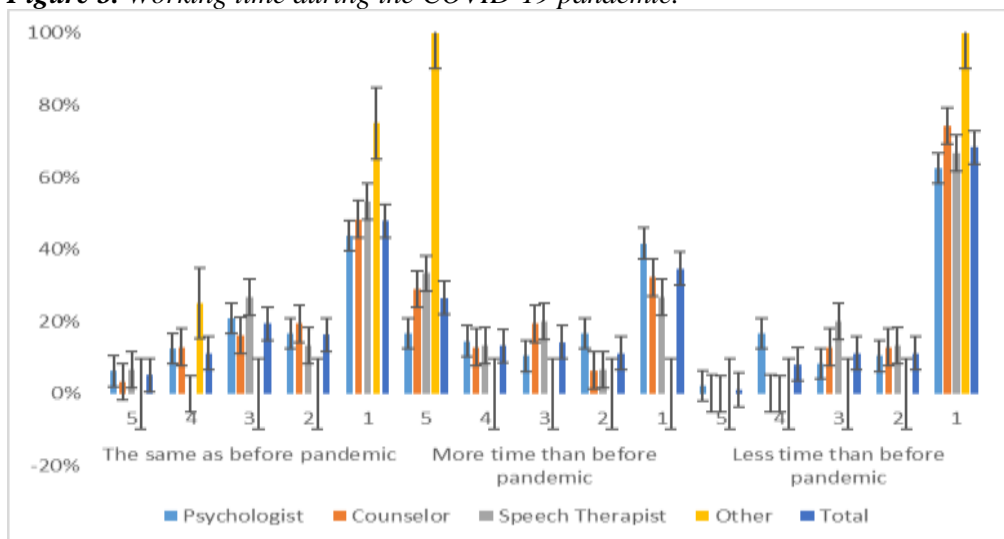
**Table 3.** Performance of tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the respondents (depending on the position held).

Position	Tasks from the teaching load of a specialist in the counseling center							
	Diagnosis: values for mode 1: definitely no	Therapy: values for mode 5: definitely yes	Consultation: value for mode 5: definitely yes	Training for teachers: values for mode 1: definitely not	Support networks: values for mode 4: rather yes	Providing information values for mode 5: definitely yes	Intervention in a student's home: values for mode 1: definitely not	Participation in multidisciplinary teams: values for mode 5: definitely yes
	percentage of answers [%]							
Psychologist n=48	73	15	50	54	29	54	71	35
Counselor n=31	74	19	65	45	29	65	68	39
Speech therapist n=15	60	27	67	53	27	53	60	47
Other n=4	50	25	50	75	25	50	50	75
Total N=98	70	27	57	52	17	57	67	40

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

Next, the specialists were asked how much time it took to perform the tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Negative answers prevailed in each group of specialists (1) for the statements that tasks included in the teaching load took the same amount of time (48%) or less (68%). Responses of the respondents to the statement that the performance of the tasks included took more time were more varied, as shown in Figure 3. Speech therapists (33%) and other specialists (100%) gave more positive answers (5), whereas psychologists (42%) and counselors (32%) gave more negative answers (1). Specialists of the counseling centers stated that their work time during the pandemic was longer than before the pandemic started.

**Figure 3.** Working time during the COVID-19 pandemic.



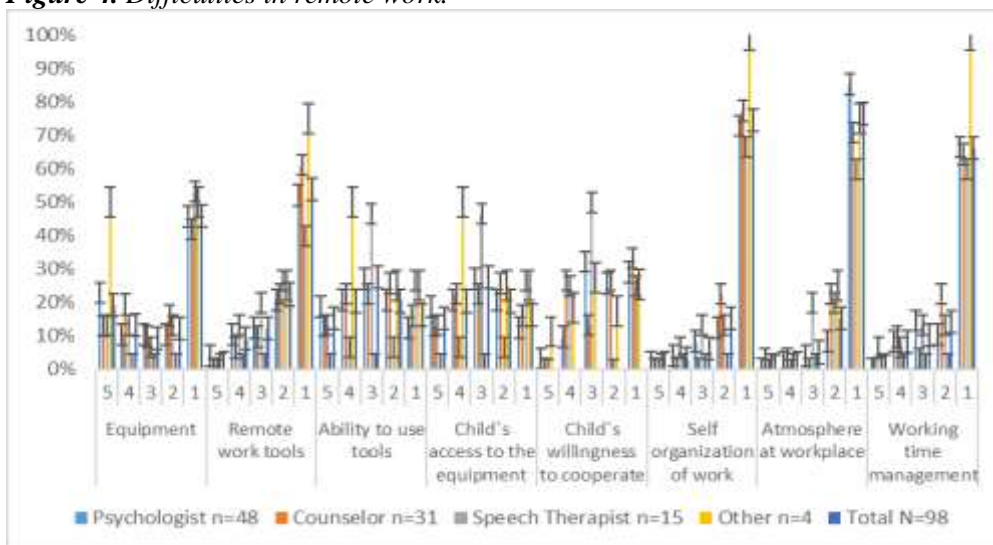
**Source:** Author's elaboration.

The next question was related to the difficulties encountered by specialists in remote work performed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The answers are presented in Figure 4. The most of respondents chose definitely negative answers (1) concerning the difficulties in the form of remote work tools (54%), self-organization of work (74%), the atmosphere at the workplace (77%) and working time management (66%), considering that they do not constitute an obstacle in performing tasks included in the teaching load using remote work.

As far as access to equipment by an employee is concerned, 46% of respondents gave a negative answer (1), except for other specialists, who gave a positive answer in 50% (5). This means that access to the equipment made it difficult for these specialists to perform remote work. In terms of the ability to use remote working tools, 27% of speech therapists gave a negative answer (1), whereas 50% of other professionals gave a positive answer (4). The most frequent answer was neutral (3), which was given by 28 % of respondents.

In conclusion, the above data demonstrated that the ability to use the tools for remote work was definitely an obstacle for other specialists but not for speech therapists. In response to difficulties for children in the access to the equipment, neutral answers dominated (3), declared by 28% of the respondents, of which 47% were speech therapists. As regards the child's willingness to cooperate with a specialist, 28% of the respondents gave a neutral answer (3) and 26% gave a negative answer (1), of which the most negative opinions were given by a group of counselors (33%). This means that child's unwillingness to work with a specialist is a particular difficulty for this group.

**Figure 4.** Difficulties in remote work.



**Source:** Author's elaboration.

When analyzed the relationship between the position held and the performance of the tasks, a relationship was noted between the declared difficulty and the position held ( $r_s \approx 1$ ). However, it was found that the position held did not influence the child's willingness to cooperate with a specialist ( $r_s \approx 0$ ) and the atmosphere at the workplace ( $r_s \approx 0$ ). The variables studied are not dependent ( $r_p \approx 0$ ),  $p > \alpha$  ( $\alpha=0.000001$ ).

The respondents were then asked what ICT tools they used in their work before and during the pandemic, and which of them can be used after the COVID-19 pandemic ends. The results are presented in Table 4. As regards the use of telephones to contact the child/parent/teacher, all groups of specialists declared positive answers (5), indicating this tool as being used successfully before (70%), during (52%), and after the pandemic (57%). Email communication before the pandemic was positively assessed (5) by 40% of respondents, whereas that after the pandemic - by 46%. Opinions on the use of emails during the pandemic were more varied, with 39% of respondents giving positive answers (5) and 39% giving negative answers (2).

The use of instant messaging before the pandemic (67%) and after the pandemic (42%) was negatively assessed (1) by the most of the respondents while having a positive (5) opinion on the use of this tool during the pandemic (31%). The use of teleconferencing tools both before and after the pandemic was assessed negatively (1) by 81% and 42% of respondents, respectively. The assessments of the use of this form of contact during the pandemic were distributed evenly, from positive to neutral (5-4-3). The above results indicate that not all ICT tools used during the pandemic can, according to the respondents, be used after the pandemic. This mainly concerns instant messaging and teleconferencing tools. The use of telephones and emails was much more positive as these tools were considered useful both before and after the pandemic.

**Table 4.** ICT tools that were used by the respondents before and during the pandemic and that can be used after it ends

Tool	Position	during the pandemic					after the pandemic					before the pandemic				
		percentage of answers [%]														
Answer*		5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Telephone	Psychologist	60	19	15	6	0	50	21	21	2	6	63	27	10	0	0
	Counselor	52	35	10	3	0	68	16	16	0	0	81	13	3	3	0
	Speech therapist	27	33	33	7	0	60	20	13	7	0	73	7	20	0	0
	Other	50	25	25	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	75	25	0	0	0
	Total	52	27	16	5	0	57	20	17	2	3	70	19	9	1	0
Answer*		5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
email	Psychologist	31	23	23	13	10	38	19	23	6	15	31	10	8	15	35
	Counselor	52	16	23	10	0	55	19	23	0	3	55	10	6	3	26
	Speech therapist	33	47	13	0	7	53	13	13	20	0	27	7	20	27	20
	Other	50	0	50	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	75	25	0	0	0
	Total	39	23	22	39	6	46	19	20	6	8	40	10	9	12	29
Answer*		5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
instant messenger	Psychologist	21	23	23	19	15	15	6	15	13	52	2	0	6	17	75
	Counselor	39	23	26	0	13	26	13	23	6	32	16	6	0	13	65
	Speech therapist	47	20	7	7	20	13	20	13	27	27	20	0	20	7	53
	Other	25	25	0	0	50	0	50	0	0	50	0	50	0	0	50
	Total	31	22	20	10	16	17	12	16	12	42	9	4	6	13	67
Answer*		5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
teleconferencing tools	Psychologist	25	25	25	10	15	15	6	15	13	52	0	0	0	13	88
	Counselor	29	19	26	10	16	26	13	23	6	32	3	0	3	13	81
	Speech therapist	33	20	27	7	13	13	20	13	27	27	13	0	0	20	67
	Other	50	25	0	0	25	0	50	0	0	50	0	25	0	25	50
	Total	29	22	24	9	15	17	12	16	12	42	3	1	1	14	81

**Note:** \*”1” means: definitely not; “5” means: definitely yes

**Source:** Author’s elaboration.

There is a correlation between the position held and a positive attitude to the use of phones as a tool to contact the child/parent/teacher before ( $p \leq \alpha$ ,  $\alpha = 0.99$ ), during ( $p \leq \alpha$ ,  $\alpha = 0.99$ ), and after the pandemic ( $p \leq \alpha$ ,  $\alpha = 0.781$ ). A similar correlation was found between the occupied position and the choice of email as a proper tool for contact with the child/parent/teacher during ( $p \leq \alpha$ ,  $\alpha = 0.259$ ) and after the pandemic ( $p \leq \alpha$ ,  $\alpha = 0.367$ ).

However, a relationship was not found between the position held and the use of instant messaging and teleconferencing tools before the pandemic ( $r_s \approx 0$ ,  $r_p \approx 0$ ). The counseling specialists also indicated the following difficulties they encountered in the performance of their tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- difficulty in establishing contact with a parent or child during specialist's working hours (20 people);
- separation of personal time from working time, organization of work at home, reconciliation of professional duties with the care of own children (14 persons);
- use of own equipment: telephone, computer, software, Internet (12 persons);
- equipment difficulties and lack of conditions for the child or parent: housing conditions, lack of equipment, lack of intimacy, parental control;
- mental strain after support interviews;
- the need to learn new technologies;
- restrictions imposed by the government;
- access to high-speed Internet;
- additional responsibilities assigned by the manager (writing articles, newsletters, maintaining the website);
- difficulties with the therapy for young children who do not want to use instant messengers;
- lack of parent's willingness to make contact with the center;
- own work of parents, who additionally have to devote time to the education of their children; in this situation, the therapy recedes into the background;
- work overload;
- the load related to remote learning;
- the employee's feeling that he or she is not doing anything great and that they won't meet the teaching load;
- the employee's fear that he or she won't get paid;
- working using private equipment gives rise to a lot of stress, e.g., breaking General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR);
- no software or a scanner;
- no personal contact with the customer.

## **5. Discussion**

Literature research shows that interest in the topic of remote working in management publications increased rapidly in 2020 with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are aware that our research is of a pilot nature and is only the basis

for further exploring the issue under consideration. However, the rank and character of psychological and pedagogical assistance in the COVID-19 pandemic are critical.

The form and organization of work of specialists who provide it, forced by the situation, develop new methods and tools to fulfill their professional duties as efficiently as possible. Attention should be paid to the emergence of new solutions, for example, the use of ICT tools that can be implemented in the activities of counseling center specialists after the COVID-19 pandemic ends.

It is worth noting that researchers (Cho, 2020) drew attention to the need to examine the functioning of the organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may allow for the assessment of the level of implementation of the developed solutions in the facilities after the pandemic. The literature analysis shows that the form of remote work undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate the conflict between personal life and family (Milliken *et al.*, 2020).

The survey confirmed this, as the respondents indicated that it is difficult for them to separate their personal time from their working time, organize their work at home, and reconcile professional duties with caring for their children. Obtained results are in contrast to those obtained by Charbonneau and Doberstain (2020) who discussed the problem of management and productivity of employees performing remote work. The focus of management during the COVID-19 pandemic has been shifted to the employee himself. He has become responsible for the organization of his or her working time, choosing forms and tools and finding a balance between professional duties and personal life.

Furthermore, the productivity of employees performing remote work may result from the specificity of their position, while involvement in their duties may result from their individual traits. From the perspective of introverted people, focused on work, and those who want to reconcile many different jobs or freely combine family and professional spheres, remote working can be a very beneficial solution. For those who care about daily contact with people or those who are easily distracted, it can be a threat to productivity (Sęczkowska, 2019).

Tyler (2004) argued that most of the time, in the working environment, is consumed for contact with people. It turns out that without such contact, people also fail to manage working time. "There is now a social demand for a sufficiently in-depth analysis of time management. The efficient use of working time, which is becoming scarce and increasingly valuable, is particularly important here" (Kozioł and Kozioł, 2018). All employees are assessed in this way, but the ability to manage working time, especially in conditions that are completely different from those of the past, turns out to be a difficult skill. The time of the COVID-19 pandemic caused many sectors of the economy to find themselves in a new reality.

## **6. Conclusions**

The facilities were not prepared to perform activities using remote work. The respondents employed in facilities with more than 20 employees declared to work remotely. In contrast, those working in the institution with fewer than ten specialists declared to be on duty more often. Respondents from the facilities with 10 to 15 employees declared a combination of remote work and on-duty time. The relationship between the position held and remote work was demonstrated.

Analysis of the effect of the position on the task performance load revealed a relationship between the variables studied, as confirmed by statistical analysis. Respondents surveyed declared that therapy, consultation, providing information and participation in the multidisciplinary teams were the tasks they managed to perform. Counselors declared the greatest difficulties with making diagnoses; other specialists emphasized problems with the organization of training, whereas psychologists - in the field of interventions in the student's home.

In response to the question about working time during the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents declared that the tasks undertaken took more time than before the pandemic. As far as the relationship between the position and the obstacles related to the task performance using remote work is concerned, the presence of such a relationship was noted, as confirmed by statistical analysis. Access to equipment and the ability to use remote working tools were declared to the greatest extent by other specialists. Counselors mostly reported the unwillingness of the child to cooperate as a difficulty in the performance of tasks.

The relationship between the position and the tool used before the COVID-19 pandemic to perform tasks included in the teaching load during remote work was confirmed. The respondents reported that not all the ICT tools they had used before and during the pandemic would be useful after the pandemic. They suggested that this was especially true for instant messaging and teleconferencing tools. The use of phones and emails was assessed as useful before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organizations that before the COVID-19 pandemic carried out tasks through broadly understood interpersonal contacts should focus on a detailed analysis of their activities, focusing on those that can be carried out remotely. An important aspect is also providing employees with appropriate tools and training in their use. Acquiring the skills to use new technologies will allow specialists to avoid many difficulties, and the managers of organizations will ensure executive order when necessary to work remotely.

It should be emphasized that undertaking this form of work allows organizations to recruit highly qualified employees whose availability was limited, for example, for



territorial reasons. It will also allow you to avoid downtime at work and reduce employment.

Modification of working in institutions providing services with a high level of interpersonal interactions, forced by epidemic conditions, indicates new opportunities and solutions that can be used to improve the quality of work and increase its efficiency after the pandemic is over. Developing procedures and defining standards of conduct in these organizations will secure them in unforeseen difficulties in implementing activities that are considered traditional.

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