
The Impact of Remote Work on Human Well-Being

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the article is to present the results of the study that was planned and performed to check the sense of well-being of employees working at home.

Design/Methodology/Approach: To this end, the approach of the management of organizations from various industries in terms of organizing work during the SARS-Cov2 pandemic was verified, and employees were asked about their work from home, attitude to this type of work, their housing and other possibilities. The study used the CAWI computer-assisted diagnostic survey method. The research tool was a self-questionnaire. The questionnaires in the period from 12 to 21 November 2020 were completed by a total of 95 respondents (77 women and 18 men) aged 18 to 59.

Findings: The results, although statistically insignificant, showed that almost 75% of the respondents could work at home, but as many as 49% of respondents do not have a permanent place of work, but perform duties at home where it is possible. Despite the fact that the pandemic has forced the transfer of work home for fear of the safety of employees, this solution brings with it new problems in terms of ensuring the health and well-being of employees working remotely.

Practical Implications: The conclusions drawn based on the analyzes support the search for a new path to support their employees' organizations in achieving a sense of mental and physical well-being.

Originality/Value: This study is part of the research presented in two papers and exploring important and very topical problem of impact of pandemic on health and well-being.

Keywords: Remote work, the Covid-19 pandemic, worker well-being, health.

JEL classification: M2, J62.

Paper Type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world at the turn of 2019/2020, many employees were forced to switch to remote work mode. While since the 1970s a small number of companies – especially corporations - have been testing the possibilities of remote work (Leonardi, 2020), in the last two years, few organizations have not passed – even temporarily – the mode of performing duties from home. Remote work (sometimes interchangeably called teleworking) is associated with performing duties from home, often during rigid working hours, and often subject to greater control than work at the company's premises (e.g., by monitoring logins to the employee mail or tracking programs) (<https://biznesprawnik.pl/2021/02/11/praca-zdalna-a-kontrola-pracownikow-jakie-mozliwosci-ma-pracownica/>).

The introduction of the pandemic has directed the work of many people into new directions – organizing a workplace at home. In undertaking this topic, a hypothesis was put forward that those employees in Poland most often do not know how to organize their professional life in the sphere so far occupied only for private life, i.e., home. Therefore, working remotely creates an additional burden for them, preventing them from achieving well-being.

To consider this topic, a survey was carried out in mid-November 2020, when the world was hit by the second wave of the pandemic and the chance to return to stationary work was postponed again. Within a week, almost 100 people answered 10 short questions contained in the online survey form, and the results, although statistically insignificant, showed that almost 75% of respondents could work from home, but as many as 49% of respondents do not have a permanent place of work, but perform their duties at home wherever it is possible.

When people transferring work home, they did not know how long they would be forced to work remotely, they did not have knowledge about ergonomic workstation design (often also resources – even housing resources) and the habit of taking care of hygiene in their work. According to the author, the effects of such actions are still unknown, but it is likely that the musculoskeletal disorders will worsen in the population, which is the effect of reduced movement associated with the need to stay at home.

In the face of the changes, the rulers often did not keep up with the changes in labor regulations regarding work safety, so as to take into account the necessity of working life transferred to private homes – many regulations, e.g., regarding the need to provide an ergonomic workplace, e.g., Labor Code, Section X; as well as Council Directive 90/270 / EEC, accidents at work [Regulation of the Council of Ministers of July 1, 2009 on the determination of the circumstances and causes of accidents at work, No. 1065 item 870] and others, remained in some area unsuited to the situation.

At the same time, there is a noticeable lack of clear support for people in workplace organization, so that after the pandemic is over, they can return to their duties in good health. According to WHO, it is defined as (<https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>) "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being

and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." At the same time, in the preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization, which was developed and signed in 1946, it was assumed that "Informed opinion and active co-operation on the part of the public are of the utmost importance in the improvement of the health of the people", and "Governments have a responsibility for the health of their peoples which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures." (<https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>).

It is worth noting that the concept of health is closely related to the concept of well-being, where it is considered a synonym of "good social, economic, health and psychological functioning of an individual" (Mirski, 2009). It is also related to the so-called Global Goals – one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals indicated in the goals to be achieved by 2030 is "goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" (https://www.who.int/health-topics/sustainable-development-goals#tab_3).

2. Well-Being and Remote Work

Human well-being is a concept in positive psychology referring to elements that are positive for a human being in a situation that happens to him. It can also be considered a concept that describes the quality of life and determines the elements that can be evaluated. Some researchers claim that it is "a fairly complete set of conditions that define someone's life situation", influencing their feeling of happiness (Strykowska, 2009 as cited in Trzebińska, 2008).

Another definition extends the concept of well-being. It is considered a state that combines the element of objective and subjective evaluation. "It is not only the possession of capital, but also the awareness of it, affirmation of this state (satisfaction) and the prospect of its further development" (Mirski, 2009).

In turn, the World Health Organization identifies health with the concept of mental, physical, and social well-being. Hence, the concept will have not only a psychological effect, but also an economic and social one. The well-being of individuals will translate into the well-being of larger entities, and these will be achieved in the long term by striving for sustainable development. Increasingly, there is a need to weigh the scales towards acquiring intangible goods (freedom, ecology, maintaining health, etc.) in order to obtain a world that will not be plunged into chaos and self-destructing (e.g., the UN Sustainable Development Goals).

This is confirmed, for example, by Seligman, who emphasizes that the money economy is being replaced by the satisfaction economy. The welfare state model is more and more often considered obsolete, and is being replaced by well-being (Mirski, 2009 as cited in Seligman, 2009).

However, when analyzing the well-being during remote work, one can look at people as a group – then it can be concluded that "restrictions in movement and the introduction of social isolation rules have positively influenced the reduction of mortality because of

infections. Thus, they were beneficial for physical health (Foa *et al.*, 2020), as opposed to mental health” (Vogt-Hajder and Górny, 2020). However, as individual units, it can often be considered that employees felt not only the psychological burden associated with the pandemic, but also a physical problem related to the lack of exercise, limitations in physical activities and a workplace that was not adapted to the duties performed quickly in the home space.

In this context, examining the needs of employees before and after the pandemic, reflects the fact that well-being is not only the psychological sphere, and not all benefits provided by the employer will contribute to the better well-being of the employed people (Activity, 2020). The Report on the Future of Wellbeing and Employee Benefits Nowe Orderki presents answers to the question about the needs of employees. These results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of answers to the question "What were / are the greatest needs related to health and well-being?"

Nr.	Before the pandemic	In the new reality
1.	Regular physical activity 64%	Regular physical activity 67.5%
2.	Sleep – good sleep quality 55.8%	Healthy eating 51.5%
3.	Time – for pleasure and family 54.6%	Sleep- good sleep quality 50.4%
4.	Healthy eating 47.4%	Time – for pleasure and family 44.7%
5.	Minimizing stress 38.4%	Mental balance 43.9%
6.	Sense of professional fulfillment 37.4%	Minimizing stress 40.7%
7.	Personal development 36.5%	Personal development 32.8%
8.	Mental balance 35.4%	Sense of professional fulfillment 31.7%

Source: Activity, Report 2020.

Regarding the achievement of a sense of well-being by individuals, it is worth noting that when the study was conducted during the SARS-Cov2 pandemic, the need for regular physical activity (less than 70% of respondents), healthy eating and the need to find mental balance increased. The importance of good-quality sleep decreased slightly (decrease by 5.4% among the respondents) and the need to find time for pleasure and family (decrease by less than 10% of responses).

These results indicate human demand for a new reality that, apart from some scientists, no one expected. The state of functioning of the economies of individual countries, after the first shock caused by the pandemic, is assessed in various ways, depending on the adopted criteria.

One of the most popular rankings seems to be Bloomberg’s ranking, which determines the degree of coping with the epidemic. In the course of the research, the results of which are presented in this article, Poland, despite the introduced various restrictions (e.g., closing gyms, clubs, restaurants, etc.), was ranked 47 (currently it is 32 position (7/28/21)) out of 53 (data as of December 20, 2020). This is due to the high mortality rate, the high rate of positive tests, etc. Awareness of the dangers of a high probability of getting infected and restrictions on the possibility of practicing sports determined the

changing preferences of employees in supporting their well-being by employers (<https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-resilience-ranking/>).

3. Analysis of Results Related to Remote Work

The study used the CAWI computer-assisted diagnostic survey method. The research tool was a self-questionnaire. The questionnaires in the period from 12 to 21 November 2020 were completed by a total of 95 respondents (77 women and 18 men) aged 18 to 59. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. In the described questionnaire, the following questions were asked (Stasiuk-Piekarska, 2021):

1. Has the organization of work in the enterprise changed during the pandemic and how?
2. Are there protective measures for workers?
3. Does the employer require the use of personal protection such as masks / helmets?
4. Does the employer allow you to work from home?
5. Has the employer provided the means of working at home (and what kind)?
6. Do you have a permanent workplace adapted to the tasks to be performed (eg a separate office) at home?
7. Do you notice any negative effects of working from home (1 – physical effects)?
8. Do you notice the negative effects of working from home (2 – psychological effects)?
9. What do you think are the causes of these ailments?
10. Whether there is work at home (evaluation of this solution).

In addition, questions were asked to identify respondents in terms of gender, age, education, industry, and the size of the enterprise in which they are employed.

The questions were part of the verification of the hypothesis concerning the inability to organize professional life in the place of residence and the element concerning the conclusions on the possibility of obtaining a sense of well-being by employees.

The survey was conducted via the Internet between November 12-19, 2020. Information about it was distributed on one of the social networks, and the possibility of filling it in was made possible using the my.survio.com platform. Returns were received from 95 people. The respondents usually spent about 2-5 minutes to answer the question.

4. Remote Work in Poland – Results

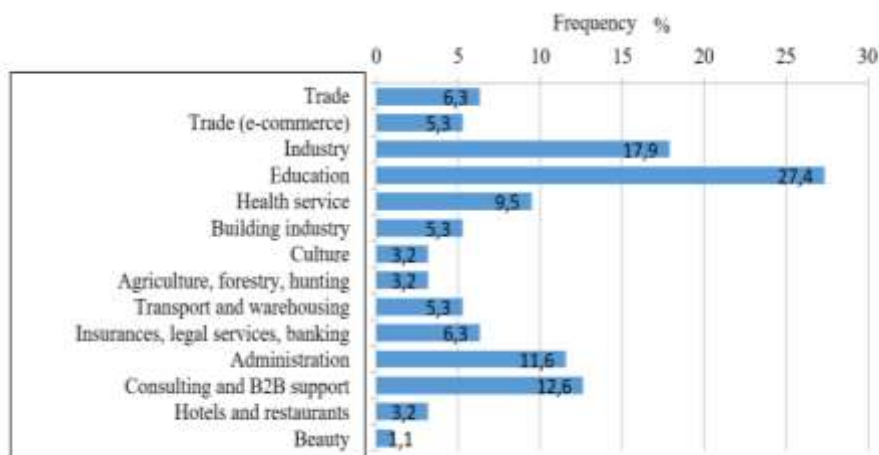
The target group of respondents were adults (i.e., from 18 years of age), professionally active. Surveys, although they have many disadvantages, during a pandemic are one of the most accessible sources for obtaining data and enabling analysis in the studied area. The author realizes that the conducted research is not without limitations. The research sample ultimately covered a diverse range of age and socio-economic groups; however, the majority of respondents were 77 women (81.1%). It probably differs from the entire population in easily observable and unobservable variables, but all participants agreed to participate in the survey.

Most of the respondents were aged 31-35, 39 (41.1%) people, 11 (11.6%) of the respondents were 18-30 years old, 21 (22.1%) of the respondents were 36-40 years old, 41-45 years 16 (16.8%) of the respondents, and 46-59 years 7 (7.4%) of the respondents. One person did not provide age.

When analyzing the level of education of the respondents, it is noticed that most of the respondents had a Master's Degree 58 (61.1%) people, 12 (12.6%) respondents had a Bachelor's or Engineering Degree, and 10 (10.5%) of the respondents had higher Doctoral education. The rest had secondary education 15 (15.8%) of the respondents.

When describing the respondents according to the industry in which they work, the respondents gave a total of 112 responses. Most often they worked in the following industries, education 26 (27.4%) people, industry 17 (17.9%) people, consulting and other B2B support 12 (12.6%) people, public administration 11 (11.6%) people. A detailed breakdown of respondents by industries they represent is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Breakdown of respondents according to the industry in which they are employed



Source: Own study.

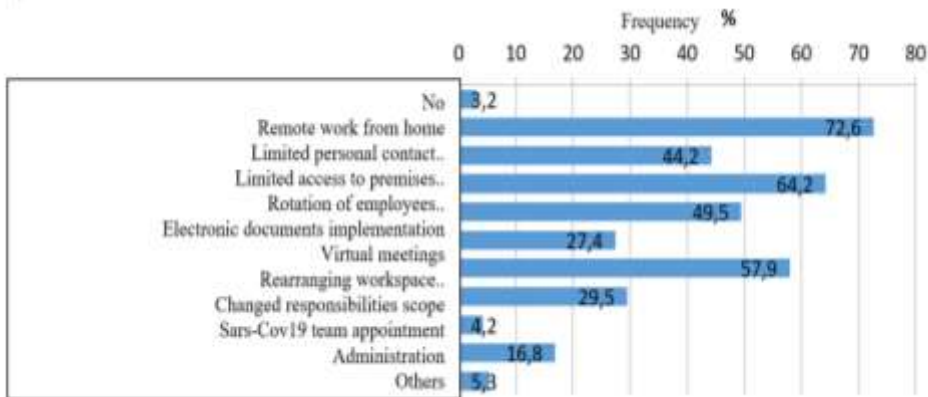
Regarding pandemic situations, many industries in Poland were "closed" from above, which could also have an impact on the results presented in this article. Taking into account the size of the enterprise in which the respondents work, it is noticed that almost half of the respondents worked in large enterprises 46 (48.4%) people, 27 (28.4%) respondents worked in medium-sized enterprises, in small 14 (14.7%) respondents, and in micro 8 (8.4%) respondents. This structure does not reflect the employment structure in Poland (40% in micro, 12% in small, 17% in medium, 31% in large, according to PARP Report of the State Agency for Enterprise Development, <https://www.parp.gov.pl/storage/publications/pdf/male%20i%20srednie%20przedsiębiorstwa%20w%20polsce%20w%202018%20r.pdf>), however, the smaller the organization, the less chance for remote work and change of solutions due to the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic.

By presenting answers to the question "whether and how did the organization of work in the enterprise change during the pandemic?" it is noted that only three respondents (3.2%) indicated that their company made no changes during the pandemic. The rest indicated from 1 to 8 answers. The most common answers were:

- remote work from home was introduced 69 (72.6%) people,
- the entry of outsiders to the company's premises was limited (contractors, clients, apprentices, etc.) 61 (64.2%) people,
- remote mode meetings were introduced (via platforms such as Skype, Ms Teams, Zoom, etc.) 55 (57.9%) people,
- employee rotation was introduced and restrictions in direct contact between teams – 47 (49.5%) people,
- restrictions on contact with customers were introduced - 42 (44.2%) people.

The results are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "Has the organization of work in the enterprise changed during the pandemic and how?"



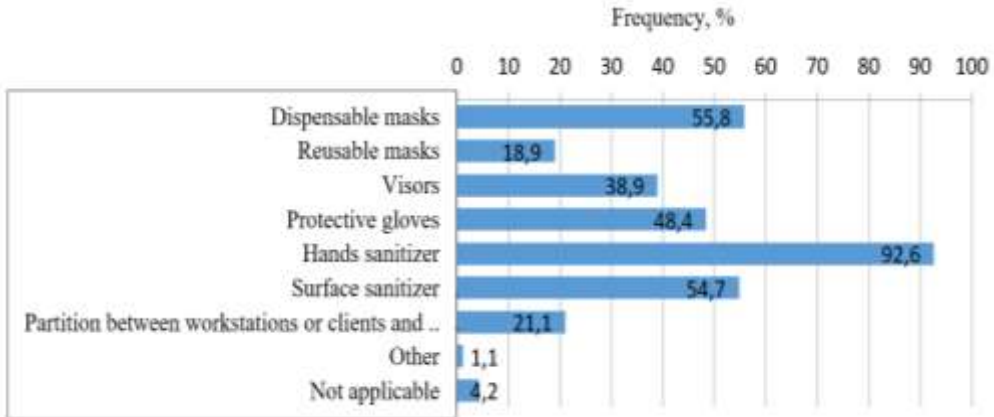
Source: Own study.

Among the answers "other", the respondents indicated the following changes (single indications): "we had to wait for permission from the authorities, despite the fact that the director had previously applied for permission from the Sanepid)", "body temperature measurement", "regulation of the use of the canteen", "2-shift shift work was introduced. All in all, organization works from 7 to 23.30 with a 30-minute break for group exchange" and "the canteen is closed".

When analyzing the answers to the next question regarding the availability of protective equipment, the respondents most often mentioned: hand sanitizer 88 (92.6%) people, disposable masks 53 (55.8%) people, liquid for disinfecting flat surfaces (such as a desk, etc.) 52 (54.7%) people, protective gloves 46 (48.4%) people.

One person stated as "others" that "my husband printed the helmets for the teaching staff, the disinfectant was refilled in several places by other teachers". The results are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "Are there any protective measures for employees?"

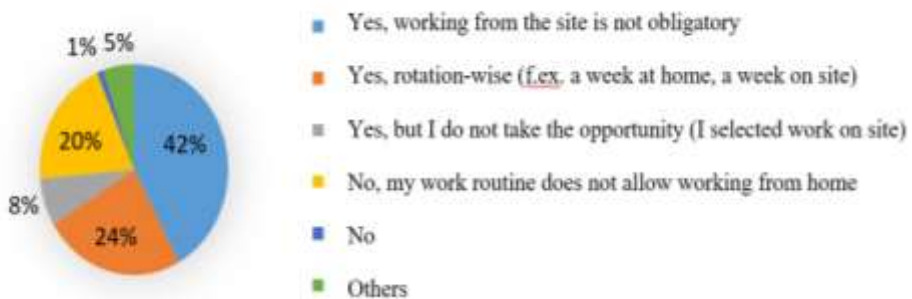


Source: Own study.

In most respondents, the employer required the use of personal protective equipment, such as masks/visors in 73.7% of people. Although the availability of protection measures seems to be a distant issue in the context of employee welfare, during the pandemic many employees appreciated employers for providing them by employers, especially bearing in mind the beginning of the SARS-Cov2 events, when such elements were lacking even in hospitals and other medical facilities.

When approaching the issues related to remote work, it is noted that almost 80% of respondents answered positively to the question "does the employer allow work from home?" Work from home could not be performed by 20 (21.1%) respondents (in 19 of them the type of work did not allow it). The results are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "does the employer allow you to work from home?"

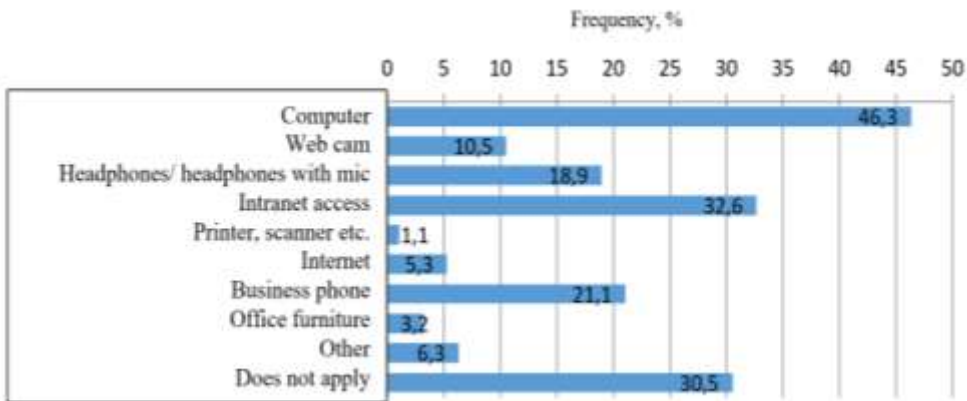


Source: Own study.

Individual responses to "other" were related to the possibility of remote work up to 5 days a month, a maximum of 2 days a week, allowing only some employees to work remotely if the nature of the tasks performed allows it or excluding the necessary meetings or the inability to work from the office (work only at home).

Analyzing the above, it can be noticed that despite the variable situation resulting from the number of infections, many companies try to maintain the possibility of remote work, often seeing the benefits (or at least no loss, e.g., in productivity) associated with it. The next question was a request to indicate what means of working at home were made available by the employer. Detailed results are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Multiple responses from the respondents to the question "Has the employer provided funds for working at home (and what kind)?"



Source: Own study.

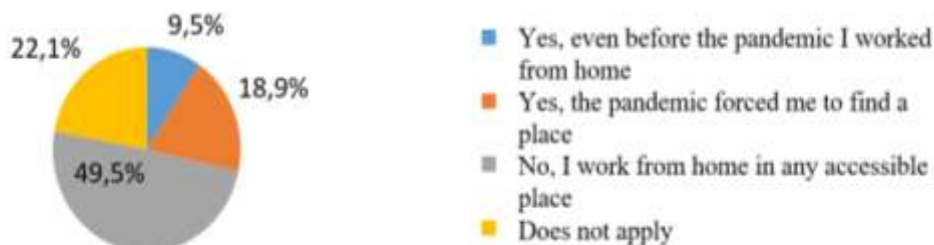
Among the responses, other respondents indicated that interested persons received hardware support, but they did not due to lack of needs or it was possible to report a demand for equipment. One person declared that their company supposedly has the possibility to use a company laptop but has not used it yet. One respondent also indicated that the organization could provide a monitor and a docking station, and two people indicated that nothing was given.

It is surprising how few people received office equipment such as a printer or access to office furniture. This is puzzling considering that people working in offices most often switched to remote work. Looking at all the results, it is worth noting that only 46.3% of the respondents received the computer that was shared most often. Regarding the sense of well-being related to remote work, it can be concluded that even though at the time of the study the pandemic had already lasted some 10 months, in fact most employers shifted the responsibility for organizing the workplace and equipment to the employee to a large extent.

Another question is also related to the physical workplace and concerned the possession of a permanent workplace adapted to the tasks performed by the respondents (e.g., a separate office). Almost half of the respondents did not have a permanent and tailored

workplace at home 47 (49.5%) people, 27 (28.4%) respondents had such a place at home. The results are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Responses of the respondents to the question "Do you have a permanent workplace at home, adapted to the tasks performed (e.g., a separate office)?"



Source: Own study.

In the context of seeking well-being, both mental and physical, it should be emphasized that this condition does not facilitate the separation of professional and private life, and additionally may generate both mental and physical burden (due to poorly selected workplace furnishings, inappropriate positions at work, incorrect selected lighting of the workplace and others).

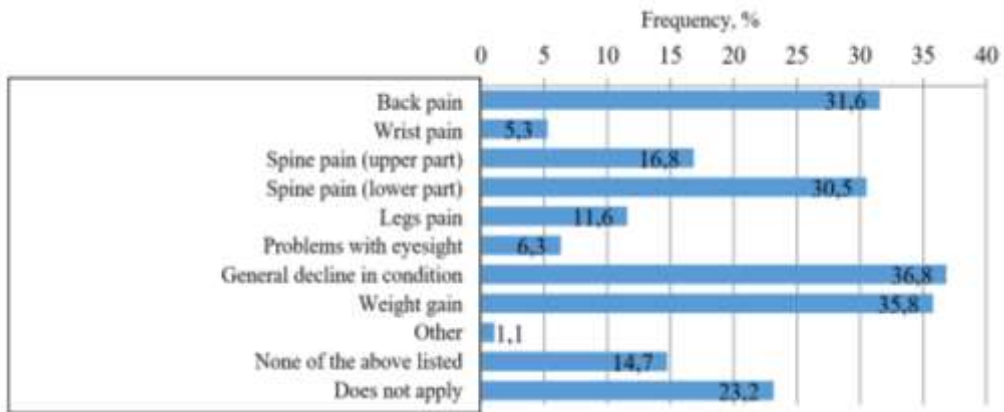
The above data show that even though the study was conducted during the second wave of the coronavirus in Poland (November 2020), for six months most of the respondents worked in ad-hoc positions, without a specially designated place for work. It may be related to the size of residential premises in Poland. In relation to data from other countries, it is noted that in Poland the average usable floor space of a flat is 75.1 m² (as at the end of 2018). This is the 20th place out of 24 surveyed EU countries (the EU average is 96.4 m²).

It is worth mentioning that the usable floor space of a flat in Poland per person is 28.2 m², while in the EU it is 41.9 m². The average number of rooms per person in Poland is 1.1 (last place in the EU), while the average for EU countries is 1.7 rooms (Report on Housing in Poland, Ministry of Development, March 2020).

When examining the impact of remote work on the well-being of employees, the respondents were asked "do you notice the negative effects of working from home (1 – physical effects)?" Respondents gave up to 6 answers, 14 (14.7%) respondents did not experience any physical effects of working at home. The respondents most often experienced, general decline in condition (faster fatigue) 35 (36.8%) people, weight gain 34 (35.8%) people, back pain –30 (31.6%) people, back pain (lower part) 29 (30.5%) people. One person reported as "the other" "No social contact". The results are shown in Figure 7.

Analyzing the results, slightly more than 1/3 of the respondents noticed a general decline in condition and an increase in body weight. This may be related to the lack of the need to travel to work and around the workplace, as well as to limitation of physical activity after work.

Figure 7. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "Do you notice the negative effects of working at home (1 – physical effects)?"

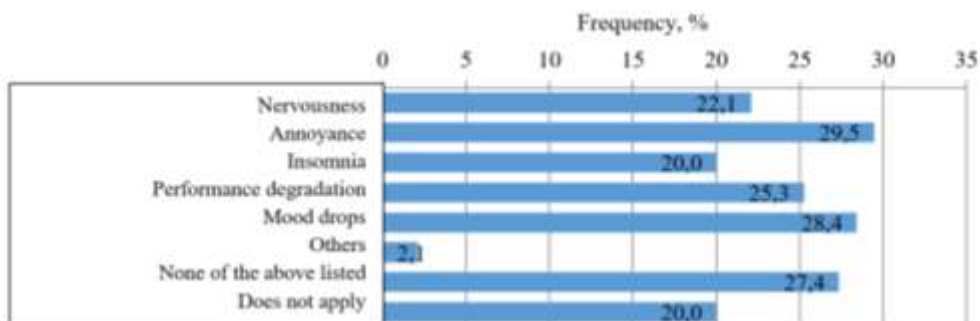


Source: Own study.

Also, over 30% of respondents experience broadly understood back pain and pain in the lower spine. Although these results are not statistically significant, considering the duration of the pandemic, the damage to health associated with lack of exercise and an unmatched workplace may cause degeneration and disease in a large group of people of working age. Also, the fact that less than 15% of respondents do not experience any symptoms makes it difficult to talk about well-being among the surveyed employees.

Referring to the negative effects of working at home, it is impossible not to refer to the mental sphere and related ailments (though probably not only with this, because the overall situation related to the pandemic also affects people's mental health). Answering the question "do you notice the negative effects of working at home (2 – psychological effects)?" respondents gave up to 6 answers, 26 (27.4%) respondents did not experience any psychological effects of working at home. The respondents most often experienced, irritability 28 (29.5%) people, decreased mood 27 (28.4%) people, decreased performance 24 (25.3%) people. Two people reported as "other" "no direct contact with the team" and "depression". The answers are presented in the diagram in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Multiple answers of the respondents to the question "Do you notice the negative effects of working at home (2 – psychological effects)?"

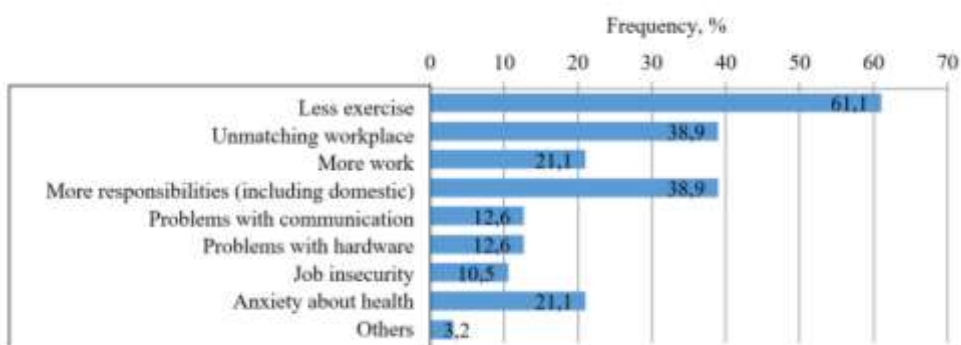


Source: Own study.

At the time of the study, over a quarter of the respondents experienced irritability, decreased mood, decreased performance. Referring to secondary sources, e.g., in a study conducted by Długosz (2020), students from Kraków ($n = 3000$) reported an increase in the frequency of depressive symptoms, dizziness or stress during the pandemic (Kosowski and Mróz, 2020 quoted in Długosz, 2020).

The pandemic caused many people problems related to the psychological nature not only due to the blurring of the private and professional spheres, but also due to the introduced restrictions, e.g., in access to culture and others. Also, uncertainty about the health of one's own and relatives, and the issue of employment stability were certainly not insignificant in the sense of well-being or the lack of it. Therefore, another question to the respondents concerned the causes of the ailments. The distribution of answers is presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Repeated responses of the respondents to the question "How do you think what the causes of these ailments are?"



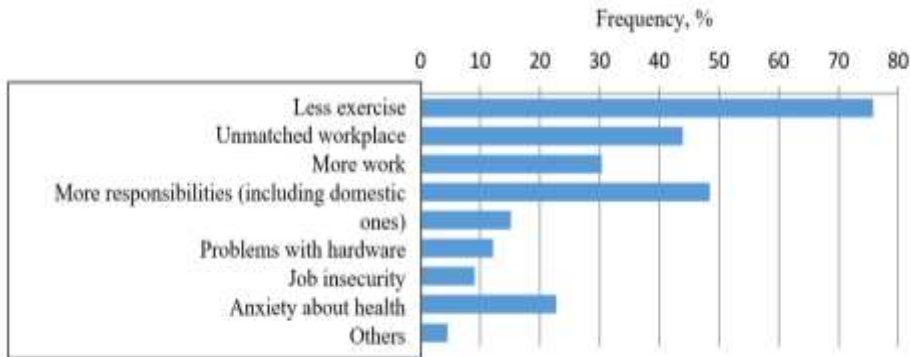
Source: Own study.

Respondents gave up to 8 answers. The respondents most often gave the following answers: less movement 58 (61.1%) people, unmatched workplace 37 (38.9%) people, more chores (including home duties) 37 (38.9%) people. Three people reported as "other": "working alone", "different specificity of work – conducting online classes is looking at the computer without rest for the eyes and body, without the freedom of relative movement" and "anxiety about what the government will come up with this week and how this will affect the organization of my life; no possibility of rest, ie spending time without children". When analyzing the answers of the respondents, excluding people who did not register the negative physical and mental effects of working at home ($n = 66$), it was noticed that the most frequent indications were:

- less exercise 50 (75.8%) people,
- more responsibilities (including domestic ones) 32 (48.5%) people,
- unmatched workplace 29 (43.9%) people.

The distribution of answers is presented in Figure 10.

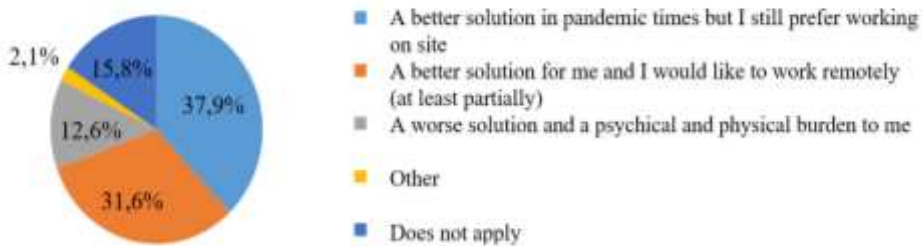
Figure 10. Multiple answers of the respondents to the question "What do you think are the causes of the aforementioned ailments?", N = 66



Source: Own study.

The above answers largely coincide with assumptions about the causes of physical and mental ailments. When assessing the level of satisfaction of respondents with the possibility of working at home, they were asked the question "is working at home". Most of the respondents believed that working from home is a better solution 66 (69.5%) people. Working at home was a worse solution according to 12 (12.6%) respondents. Two people stated as "other", "Partial remote work would be a good solution on a permanent basis, but with ensuring the conditions of such work (desk, chair, monitor)" and "On condition that equipment such as a chair, Internet, etc., is co-financed." The detailed results are presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "Is working at home:"



Source: Own study.

Less than 40% of respondents indicated that working from home is a better solution in the times of a pandemic, however, the preferred workplace is a workplace. At the same time, slightly over 30% appreciate the possibility of working remotely and would like to do so, at least partially, also after mastering the virus that causes Covid-19. The above results show that there has been a change in employees that may have made it easier for them to achieve well-being by eliminating burdensome commuting to and from work, the need to get ready for the office, and other elements that are offset by working in the place of residence.

5. Summary

The article discusses the impact of remote work on human well-being, understood not only as his mental state, but also the physical state associated with it. The presented results show that many people work in ad hoc conditions, even though remote work has often started in March 2020. This may pose a threat to their sense of well-being because the lack of adaptation of the workplace to their anthropometric dimensions and performed duties not only reduces productivity, but may also cause musculoskeletal ailments and, in the long term, degeneration of the musculoskeletal system.

Although the results are not statistically significant, they indicate trends in the labor market in Poland (and probably partly in the world) in terms of remote work. This study may be an introduction to redefining the achievement of a sense of well-being in society, and provide support for companies in planning to support their employees, e.g. through various types of benefits. At the same time, bearing in mind that offering benefits is not tantamount to achieving the well-being of employees.

As shown in the survey, people often have insufficient support in terms of equipping the workplace by employers not only with office equipment, but also with furnishing their workplace at home. Although this article did not check in detail the relationship between the surface area of the respondents' apartments and the possibility of creating a job, as the data was cited, many people in Poland live in premises below the average size for the European Union per person (41.9 m²). This will also involve the interaction between the respondents' remote work and the life and work (learning) of their fellow residents.

In Poland, at the time of the study, all distance learning was carried out (from the 1st grade of primary school to teaching at universities), as a result, in one home, 4-5 people worked (or studied) in an apartment at the same time. The last element that should be extended to future research is the identification of knowledge about workplace ergonomics among the respondents. There is a high probability that even having a desk that is a workplace, the respondents do not have it designed in accordance with the principles of ergonomics (technical facilities are not adapted to the anthropometric dimensions of the user).

Moreover, due to the different approach and variability in the scope of guidelines (also regarding staying at home, using sports facilities and others), no comparison was made of the results concerning employees in other countries outside Poland. In terms of analyzes, it could be a more precise identification, e.g., in terms of mental burden due to the existence of a pandemic or other problems in everyday life, and not clearly resulting from the restrictions related to the introduction of a pandemic in each country.

However, as the pandemic has shown many times, well-being can be obtained by helping oneself and others - even in everyday activities. In this way, by enriching social capital, which is the economic dimension of well-being, we also shape the positive element of this unpredictable reality.

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