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## SELF-ESTEEM AND SCHOOL WELL-BEING IN STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC\*

**Introduction:** The coronavirus pandemic as a sudden, surprising event, evoking strong emotions and disorganizing life should be analyzed as a crisis event. How young people experience a crisis depends on how they give meaning and importance to the event (positive – negative – ambivalent, important – unimportant) and their subjective level of mental strain.

**Research Aim:** This article presents the authors' own research on the levels of self-esteem and school well-being in students during the COVID-19 pandemic and the relationship between these variables. The research was conducted online among seventh- and eighth-grade students of primary schools and first-grade students of secondary schools in the Lubelskie Voivodeship.

**Method:** A diagnostic survey was used in the research.

**Results:** The vast majority of the surveyed students have high and medium levels of self-esteem. Gender, age, and grade significantly differentiated self-esteem. As a result of over year-long social isolation caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the well-being of the surveyed students gradually deteriorated. The obtained results indicate there is a relationship between the surveyed students' self-esteem and their well-being at school before and during the pandemic.

**Conclusions:** It is necessary to provide psychological and pedagogical support to all students, regardless of their current mental condition. In addition, systemic solutions should be introduced, which, on the one hand, will prepare educational institutions and entities responsible for this process during remote and hybrid work in the best possible way, and on the other hand, they will help to maintain the balance between teaching and upbringing supported by prevention.

**Keywords:** self-esteem, school well-being, student, COVID-19 pandemic.

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\* Suggested citation: Bochniarz, A., Olejnik, U. (2022). Self-Esteem and School Well-Being in Students during the Pandemic. *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny*, 41(4), 139–156. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/lrp.2022.41.4.139-156>



## INTRODUCTION

Sociologists, psychologists and educators agree that the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic causing the COVID-19 disease was for the vast majority of people something sudden and surprising, generating strong emotions such as anxiety, uncertainty, irritation, and anger, and destabilizing everyday life in many spheres. All these elements indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic can be classified as a critical life event for many individuals. Trying to cope with such an event, people usually look for its causes and try to determine its impact and importance for their own life. They also try to regain control over it and rebuild their self-esteem, which may be violated especially in a situation where the current coping methods turn out to be ineffective. Such an approach to critical events is particularly important in the context of taking up subsequent life tasks (Bochniarz, 2019, pp. 59–60; Poleszak and Pyżalski, 2020, pp. 7–8).

Children and adolescents have also been affected by rapid and unprecedented changes in everyday life triggered by the pandemic. After the first joy resulting from the closure of schools, young people experienced adaptation problems, stress and mental tension typical of a crisis situation, which results from their less developed mechanisms of dealing with critical life events. Their level of well-being during the pandemic was significantly influenced by three factors: 1) the social context, including the introduction of social isolation and distancing, changes in their lifestyle, and information on the spread of the disease in the country and around the world, 2) the family context, which consists of the financial and psychosocial situation of the family (interpersonal relations and emotional climate), and (3) young people's personality traits necessary to deal with the pandemic as a critical life event (Poleszak and Pyżalski, 2020, p. 9; Bilicki, 2020, p. 17).

The situation of children and adolescents during the pandemic is diverse. Young people's perception and experience of the pandemic as a critical life event are influenced by their subjective interpretations of the situation and the way they respond to it by choosing appropriate coping strategies. It depends on both personal and social factors. In the literature on the subject, these factors are usually referred to as resources. Heszen and Sęk (2008, p. 161) treat them as health predictors, acting as a buffer, and triggering adaptive reactions in the individual helping them return to the state of relative homeostasis. This means that the more resources a person has, the greater their chance of assessing the situation as less harmful and threatening.

Personal resources of an individual are considered the most extensive category of resources. They include self-acceptance, optimal self-esteem, a sense of identity, a sense of agency and influence over events, and a sense of self-efficacy (Heszen and Sęk, 2008, p. 163). The presented article focuses on self-esteem, which contributes to the implementation of life plans and aspirations: high self-esteem is associated with a greater subjective probability of success in various areas of human

functioning, translating into an increase in motivation, commitment and effort to achieve one's goals. The literature on the subject also emphasizes its important role in maintaining mental health: people with high self-esteem when confronted with a critical life event can use more resources that allow them to effectively cope with problems, which means that they bear much lower emotional costs associated with experiencing unpleasant stimuli (Fila-Jankowska, 2009, p. 25; Wojciszke, 2011, 2012, p. 194; Szpilak and Polczyk, 2015, p. 34). Positive judgments about oneself, comparisons and social relationships, reducing cognitive dissonance and recognizing the integrity of oneself by having a wide repertoire of positive beliefs about the self are considered important mechanisms used in maintaining, defending, and increasing self-esteem (Wojciszke, 2011, 2012, pp. 180, 183–187). Self-esteem in children and adolescents is a structure that undergoes intense development. It is shaped both by information from the environment (opinions and assessments of significant people), as well as one's own activity (experiences gained in contacts with parents, teachers and peers, institutions and culture, comparing oneself and one's own achievements with other people) (Wosik-Kawala, 2007, p. 29).

Since we used the Self-Assessment Scale developed by Morris Rosenberg in the presented research, we also understood self-assessment following the author of the measure. In his view, self-esteem is a positive or negative attitude towards one's self. Therefore, high self-esteem should be combined with the individual's belief in their own worth, which is not the same as recognizing oneself as someone better than others. On the other hand, low self-esteem is associated with a lack of self-satisfaction, which may lead the individual to reject their self (Dzwonkowska et al., 2008, p. 7).

Another term that needs to be defined is "well-being". Following Kotlarska-Michalska, we view well-being here as a subjective assessment of an individual's situation based on their own criteria, including important areas of life, values, and assessing their chances of maintaining or improving the situation they are in (Kotlarska-Michalska, 1999, p. 82).

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND GOAL

The research aimed to test the relationship between self-esteem and school well-being in students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following detailed questions were formulated: 1) What is the level of self-esteem in the surveyed students?; 2) What is the school well-being of the surveyed youth in retrospect and reality?; 3) Is there, and if so, what is the nature of a relationship between self-esteem and school well-being in the surveyed students?

## THE METHOD AND THE SAMPLE

The research was conducted online in 2020 in primary and secondary schools in Lublin (a city in eastern Poland) and adjacent towns. The sample consisted of 135 (37%) seventh-grade primary school students, 85 (24%) eighth-grade primary school students and 140 (39%) students attending the first grade of secondary school. In total, there were 360 respondents: 231 girls (64%) and 129 boys (36%). The respondents were 12–18 years of age, of which 53.1% were 14 and 15 years old (100 and 91 students, respectively), and 17.2% (62 students) were 16 years old. In general, the percentage of students living in the city compared to students living in rural areas was higher and amounted to 222 (62%) and 138 (38%) respondents, respectively.

This article presents some of the research results obtained in the research project “Student and Teacher School Well-Being in the Context of Future Tasks” carried out under the supervision of Izabella M. Łukasik, PhD, professor at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin.

The research was carried out using the Morris Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES), which consists of 10 diagnostic statements. The respondent answers the questions using a four-point scale, in which 1 means *I strongly agree*, 2 – *I agree*, 3 – *I disagree*, and 4 – *I strongly disagree*. Each answer is scored from 1 to 4 points. Half of the statements were formulated directly and half indirectly. When counting the results, the positive statements (questions 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7) need to be reversed. This is to give a higher score to answers expressing higher levels of self-esteem. The general level of self-esteem is expressed as the sum of the points obtained in the test. The higher the result obtained by the respondent, the higher their self-esteem (Dzwonkowska et al., 2008, pp. 5, 61–63).

Student well-being at school in retrospect (before the pandemic when learning took place in the classroom) and real (during the pandemic and distance learning) was determined on a five-point scale (where 1 means *bad*, 2 – *rather bad*, 3 – *neither good nor bad*, 4 – *fairly good*, 5 – *very good*) to the following statements, “In my school, before the pandemic, I felt...”; “In e-school (pandemic home education) I feel...”.

## DATA ANALYSIS

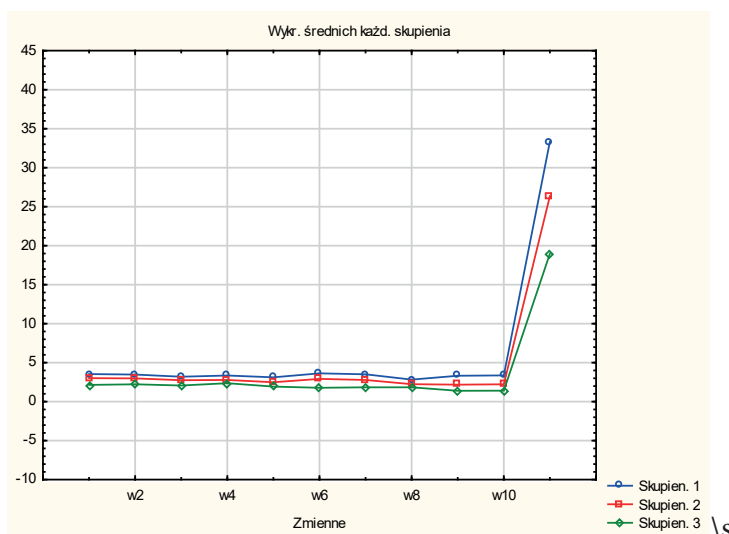
To analyze the obtained data, the following statistical methods were used: the *k*-means cluster analysis, discriminant analysis, and Pearson’s Chi-squared test. The calculations were made using the SPSS statistical program.

## RESULTS

**Self-esteem of the surveyed students**

The results obtained by the students in the Self-Esteem Scale by M. Rosenberg are presented below. The results of the respondents' self-esteem were grouped into three clusters: students with high, medium, and low levels of self-esteem. Figure 1 presents the means obtained for each of the statements, as well as the global self-esteem score for each of the clusters.

Figure 1.  
*Student's self-esteem – clusters*



Cluster 1: 144 students (high levels), Cluster 2: 149 (medium levels), Cluster 3: 67 (low levels)

Source: Authors' own study.

The first cluster, i.e. students showing high levels of self-esteem, consisted of 144 people. They obtained the highest scores out of the three identified groups in each of the ten statements of the scale, as well as the highest global self-esteem score. The medium level of self-esteem across all statements and the global score were obtained by 149 students (cluster 2). A much smaller number of students entered cluster 3 (67 people). This means that the respondents from this group had a lower level of self-esteem than their peers from the previous two groups. The vast majority of the surveyed students presented a high and medium level of self-esteem, which allows us to assume that they have a relatively wide range of behaviors to deal with the socio-emotional consequences of the pandemic, and possible failures on the way to achieving their goals stimulate these students to look for new solutions or to set completely new goals.

### Students' self-esteem and their gender

The first variable differentiating ( $p < 0.001$ ) the surveyed students' self-esteem in a statistically significant way was their gender (Table 1).

Table 1.  
*Students' self-esteem and their gender*

Self-esteem levels	Girls		Boys		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Low (cluster 3)	54	23.38	13	10.08	67	18.61
Medium (cluster 2)	106	45.88	43	33.33	149	41.39
High (cluster 1)	71	30.74	73	56.59	144	40
Total	231	100	129	100	360	100

Source: Authors' own study.

More than half of the surveyed boys showed high levels of self-esteem (56.59%, 73 respondents), while only 30.74% of the girls (71 respondents) had the same level of self-esteem. The largest number of girls (106, 45.88% of all female students) constituted the group with medium levels of self-esteem. To compare, this group included every third boy (33.33%, 43 respondents). Analysis of these two clusters clearly shows that boys had much higher self-esteem compared to girls. The results obtained in the group of students with low levels of self-esteem confirm this trend too: 80.60% (54 respondents) of this group are girls, and 19.40% (13 respondents) are boys.

### Students' self-esteem and self-esteem in their grade

Students' self-esteem is statistically significantly differentiated by belonging to a specific grade ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2).

Table 2.  
*Students' self-esteem and self-esteem in their grade*

Self-esteem levels	Grade 7 (primary)		Grade 8 (primary)		Grade 1 (secondary)		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Low (cluster 3)	10	7.41	18	21.18	39	27.86	67	18.61
Medium (cluster 2)	55	40.74	34	40	60	42.86	149	41.39
High (cluster 1)	70	51.85	33	38.82	41	29.28	144	40
Total	135	100	85	100	140	100	360	100

Source: Authors' own study.

Seventh-grade students had the highest level of self-esteem among all the respondents. More than half of them (70 respondents, which constituted 51.85% of all seventh-graders) had high self-esteem, 40.74% had medium levels of self-esteem (55 respondents), and only 7.41% (10 respondents) had low. Eighth-graders' self-esteem levels were already lower, as 38.82% of them (33 persons) had high self-esteem, 40% – medium, and 21.18% – low. As far as first-grade students of secondary schools are concerned, most of them had medium levels of self-esteem (42.86%, 60 respondents), while 29.28% of them had high (41 people), and 27.86% (39 people) had low self-esteem.

### Students' self-esteem and their age

The level of self-esteem of the surveyed students differed depending on their age ( $p < 0.006$ ) (Table 3).

Table 3.  
*Students' self-esteem and their age*

Self-esteem levels	Younger than 14		14-year-olds		15-year-olds		16-year-olds		Older than 16		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Low (cluster 3)	5	7.14	15	15	21	23.08	14	22.58	12	32.43	67	18.61
Medium (cluster 2)	29	41.43	43	43	32	35.16	33	53.23	12	32.43	149	41.39
High (cluster 1)	36	51.43	42	42	38	41.76	15	24.19	13	35.14	144	40
Total	70	100	100	100	91	100	62	100	37	100	360	100

Source: Authors' own study.

Data showed that the younger the students, the higher their level of self-esteem. In the group of students under the age of 14, more than half of them (51.43%, 36 respondents) showed high levels of self-esteem, 41.43% (29 respondents) – medium and only 7.14% (5 respondents) showed low. In the group of 14-year-olds, 42% (42 respondents) had high self-esteem, 43% (43 respondents) had medium, and 15% (15 respondents) had low. With age, the level of self-esteem lowers. Among 15-year-olds, 41.76% (38 respondents) had high self-esteem, 35.16% (32 respondents) had medium and 23.08% (21 respondents) had low. In turn, in the group of 16-year-olds, more than half of the respondents had medium self-esteem (53.23%, 33 respondents), almost every fourth respondent had high (24.19%, 15 respondents), and 22.58% (14 respondents) had low. In the case of students over 16 years of age, almost every third of them had low and medium levels of self-esteem (32.43%, 12 respondents), and 35.14% (13 respondents) had high.

### Students' self-esteem and their place of residence

There were no statistically significant differences between the level of students' self-esteem and the variable of their place of residence ( $p > 0.970$ ) (Table 4).

Table 4.  
*Students' self-esteem and their place of residence*

Self-esteem levels	Rural areas		City		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Low (cluster 3)	26	18.84	41	18.47	67	18.61
Medium (cluster 2)	56	40.58	93	41.89	149	41.39
High (cluster 1)	56	40.58	88	39.64	144	40
Total	138	100	222	100	360	100

Source: Authors' own study.

The group of students with high levels of self-esteem included 88 students (39.64%) living in the city and 56 students (40.58%) from rural areas. On the other hand, medium levels of self-esteem were reported by 56 students (40.58%) living in the countryside and 93 students (41.89%) living in the city. In the group of students with low levels of self-esteem, 26 people (18.84%) lived in rural areas, and 41 (18.47%) lived in cities.

Discriminant analysis was used to determine which variables are the best predictors of self-esteem in the studied students (Table 5).

Table 5.  
*Independent variables – discriminant equation*

N = 360	Wilks's lambda	Partial Wilks's lambda	F(2.355)	p-value	Toler.	1-Toler. (R squared)
Gender	0.90	0.91	15.48	0.00	0.96	0.03
Grade	0.89	0.93	13.19	0.00	0.98	0.01

Source: Authors' own study.

The structure of independent variables obtained this way is in two cases correlated with the dependent variable. Out of four demographic and social variables, two of them – student's gender and grade – explained the presence of the greatest differences in the level of students' self-esteem. Therefore, we can infer that in the course of remote education, girls suffered a greater decrease in their self-esteem levels compared to boys. In turn, the highest levels of self-esteem were reported by students attending the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school.

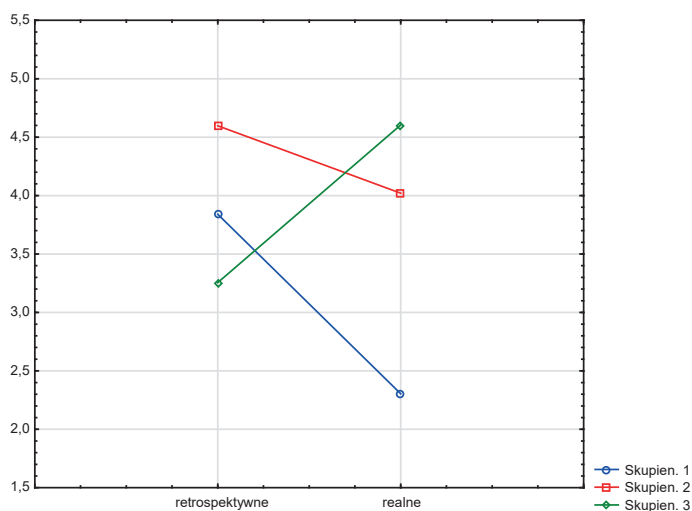


### School well-being (retrospect and real) in the surveyed students

The means of students' retrospect and real school well-being obtained as a result of the research were categorized into three clusters, which turned out to be of a different nature, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

*School well-being (retrospect and real) in the surveyed students – clusters*



Cluster 1: 125 students, Cluster 2: 149 students, Cluster 3: 86 students

Source: Authors' own study.

The largest group of students consisted of 149 students. They felt very good or good before the pandemic, and slightly worse during the pandemic. A significant deterioration in well-being was noted in cluster 1 consisting of 125 students. These respondents felt rather comfortable in the traditional school system and their well-being deteriorated significantly after switching to the remote learning system. The third cluster is the smallest (86 people). It has a distinctly different character from the previous two. Students from this group declared that their well-being during e-education was much better than before the pandemic. In the study of retrospect well-being, they most often chose the answer “neither good nor bad”, while they defined their real well-being as good and very good (see Bochniarz and Olejnik, 2021, pp. 11–13).

### Students' school well-being and their self-esteem

The relationship between the students' self-esteem results and their school well-being (retrospect and real) grouped into three clusters is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ; Pearson's  $\chi^2 = 26.622$ ;  $df = 4$ ) (Table 6).

Table 6.  
*Students' school well-being and their self-esteem*

Well-being	Self-esteem levels			
	Low (c3)	High (c1)	Medium (c2)	Total
Retrospective < real (cluster 3)	17	35	34	86
Column (%)	25.37	24.31	22.82	
Row (%)	19.77	40.70	39.53	
Total (%)	4.72	9.72	9.44	23.89
Retrospective > real (cluster 1)	37	33	55	125
Column (%)	55.22	22.92	36.91	
Row (%)	29.60	26.40	44.00	
Total (%)	10.28	9.17	15.28	34.72
Retrospective $\geq$ real (cluster 2)	13	76	60	149
Column (%)	19.40	52.78	40.27	
Row (%)	8.72	51.01	40.27	
Total (%)	3.61	21.11	16.67	41.39
Total	67	144	149	360
Total (%)	18.61	40.00	41.39	100.00

Source: Authors' own study.

The obtained results showed that a high self-esteem may translate into perceived school well-being. Every fifth surveyed student (21.11%) had a high level of self-esteem, which affected their retrospect and real well-being (cluster 2). Thirty-three people (9.17% of the total) with a high level of self-esteem experienced a significant deterioration in well-being related to the transition to the remote learning, and 35 of them were included in cluster 3, i.e. people with better real than retrospect well-being (9.72% of the total). In the case of students with medium levels of self-esteem, the largest number of them (60 respondents, constituting 16.67% of the total) was included in cluster 2, i.e. students whose well-being in e-education slightly deteriorated. The group of students who experienced a significant decrease in real well-being, compared to the retrospect, included 55 people (15.28% of the total) with medium levels of self-esteem, and 34 of them were included in cluster 3, i.e. students who feel better with remote education (9.44% of the total). In contrast, in the case of young people with low self-esteem, more than

half of them (55.22%, 37 people) experienced a significant decline in well-being during the pandemic and distance learning. Every fourth respondent (25.37%, 17 people) with a low level of self-esteem was included in cluster 3, i.e. students with better real than retrospect well-being, and almost every fourth (19.40%, 13 people) assessed their real well-being as slightly worse compared to retrospect.

The obtained results indicate the existence of a relationship between the level of self-esteem in the studied youth and their well-being during remote education. Students with higher levels of self-esteem could cope better with negative feelings and emotions related to a pandemic. On the other hand, it was harder for those whose level of self-esteem was lower to cope with isolation, limitation of peer contacts, and distance learning. Perhaps people with higher self-esteem have a more stable and positive self-image in the new reality and better coping strategies. A higher level of self-esteem may also be associated with a higher level of motivation to learn on one's own and to carry out tasks assigned to students remotely with less need for external control. In order to positively influence students' well-being, actions should be taken to increase their self-worth and self-esteem. Students in cluster 3 who felt better in the conditions of e-education also need special attention. Data show that 40.70% (35 respondents) of them had high self-esteem, 39.53% (34 respondents) had medium self-esteem, and 25.37% (17 respondents) had low. Such distribution of results clearly shows there is a group of students whose educational needs are different than that of the majority of their peers and this is not related to their low levels of self-esteem, but, as already mentioned, to a slightly different way of functioning at school, or to the problems that this group of students faced before the pandemic.

## CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the available empirical reports (see Fila-Jankowska, 2009; Szpitalak and Polczyk, 2015; Kirenko and Wiatrowska, 2015), it is reasonable to assume that self-esteem as an important component of self-awareness is related to the individual's well-being, experienced emotions, the effectiveness of their actions, and their ability to cope with life situations. Therefore, the aim of the presented research was to test the relationship between self-esteem and school well-being in students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The examined level of self-esteem in students was divided into three groups: students with high, medium, and low level of self-esteem. The variables that differentiated self-esteem in a statistically significant way were found to be: gender, age, and grade.

The dichotomy of self-esteem with regard to gender, observed in the research and visible in the literature, shows that actions aimed at increasing girls' self-es-

teem are necessary. The lower level of self-esteem of the surveyed girls may be influenced by one of the aspects of global self-esteem score, namely the self-esteem of appearance, which in recent times is under particularly strong pressure from socio-cultural norms (mass media) and, as the research results show, is a more important dimension of the structure of the self for girls than for boys (see Lachowicz-Tabaczek, 2001; Głębocka, 2010; Brytek-Matera and Rybicka-Klimczyk, 2012; Izydorczyk et al., 2018). The lower level of self-esteem in the surveyed students may be associated with many negative consequences for their psychosocial functioning, the most important of which are presenting a poorer repertoire of behaviors, worse coping with stress, difficulties in making decisions, lower persistence in actions, and subjectively worse well-being (Lachowicz-Tabaczek, 2001, pp. 33–34; Bochniarz, 2019, pp. 89–90).

Despite the undertaken social activities, mainly in social media, such as *#body-positive*, or *#imenough*, self-esteem and the self-image among girls and young women is still lower than that among men. According to Lachowicz-Tabaczek,

the process of comparing the representatives of both sexes continues from the earliest childhood and takes place in various dimensions: appearance, psyche, effectiveness, and equal treatment. This information comes from both my own observations and experiences as well as social messages, such as gender stereotypes or the rules of social roles, which are the basis for creating one's image of their own gender. At the same time [...] there are many reasons to formulate the statement that women have lower self-esteem than men. (2001, p. 34)

Considering the fact that self-esteem affects so many areas of human psycho-physical functioning, including well-being, it is necessary to consider what the school and teachers can do, what real actions to take to change this situation. It is necessary to implement not only solutions within individual schools, but they should be systematically defined in consultation with teachers and researchers involved in the exploration of this phenomenon.

Currently, in the literature on the subject, psychological and pedagogical practice, as well as social media, a lot is said about the need to educate children and adolescents in identifying emotions, coping with them, acting in stressful situations, and effective communication. All these are aimed at building young people's strong self-esteem, a positive self-image and self-acceptance, including acceptance of their own body. The aforementioned constructs are elements of strengthening mental resilience in children and adolescents, which theoretically is included in the schools' core curricula and preventive and educational programs. Theoretically, as Pankowska (2020, p. 21) states, already at the stage of school curricula, health education does not take into account a holistic approach to health, focusing primarily on physical health, ignoring psychosocial and spiritual health, and the noble assumptions are not unfortunately forged in actual action in this area. As

early as 1995, the author proposed the introduction of the subject “practical psychology” whose aim would be to develop students’ personal and social competences. Unfortunately, this postulate has not been implemented in the Polish education system so far.

The relationship between respondents’ level of self-esteem and age clearly shows that adolescents have lower and lower level of self-esteem as they mature. The presented research results show some similarity with the results described in the literature on the subject (see Keltikangas-Järvinen, 1990; Zimmerman et al., 1997; McMullin and Cairney, 2004; Robins and Trzesniewski, 2005; after: Szpitalak and Polczyk, 2015, p. 53). The decline in self-esteem with age is associated with the more and more perceptible changes in the appearance of their body, the developing ability to think abstractly, the emerging fears of the future, and possible difficulties in meeting the challenges and expectations of the environment. Adolescence is a time of social comparisons, analyzing how others see us. For young people to develop properly, it is extremely important that they create a concept of themselves as a member of a specific group, which becomes a point of reference in defining oneself (Jaskulska and Poleszak, 2015, pp. 166–167). Meanwhile, as a result of the pandemic and the related limitations in the form of social isolation, peer relationships have clearly suffered. It turned out that e-contact is not able to replace young people’s face-to-face meetings and conversations with their peers. As a result, negative emotions such as sadness, a sense of loneliness, anger, a sense of injustice or social anxiety intensified in the respondents. Experiencing them not only changes the quality of life, but also lowers self-esteem.

Students’ level of self-esteem decreased not only with age, but also with attending higher grades. The impact of the grade variable on students’ self-esteem, is related to the specificity of the situation in which students of each grade find themselves. A decline in self-esteem in eighth-grade students and a deterioration in their well-being may be linked to the stress of taking the eighth-grade exam. The eighth grade is also the end of a certain stage of life for these students, which can be associated with strong emotions. At the end of school, many schools organized longer excursions, eighth-grade balls or end-of-school-year ceremonies. The pandemic “deprived” young people of such opportunities, direct contacts with peers, and support from teachers in this difficult and important period for them. The surveyed students of the first grades of secondary schools did not even manage to get to know each other well. Apart from the stress of changing schools and finding a new peer group, the transition to distance learning became an additional factor that could lower their self-esteem and well-being. A particularly difficult experience for students who did not really get to know each other well was active participation in classes, showing themselves on the webcam, and the drastically increased amount of requirements and time devoted to learning (see Grzelak et al., 2020a, 2020b; Grzelak and Żyro, 2021). If education is ever again faced with

this type of crisis and the need to organize online classes, under no circumstances should lessons with the class teacher be excluded from the timetables. Secondly, in the activities undertaken by the school and teachers, health, meeting the students' needs, and caring for relationships should be of primary importance, and only then formal education. The authors of the report *Thinking about Pedagogy in an Unfolding Pandemic* present this issue in the concisely sounding slogan "Maslow before Bloom" (Doucet et al., 2020, pp. 8–9).

During more than a year of social isolation related to the coronavirus pandemic, the students' well-being, in particular those from the senior classes of primary and secondary schools, significantly decreased (see Bieganowska and Pankowska, 2020; Bigaj and Dębski, 2020; Buchner and Wierzbicka, 2020; Długosz, 2020; Jagielska, 2020; Makaruk et al., 2020; Pyżalski, 2020; Grzelak and Żyro, 2021). The analyzes carried out in the presented study allowed us to identify three clusters of students with different profiles of well-being:

- students whose well-being significantly decreased during the pandemic,
- students who experienced a slight decline in their well-being during e-education,
- students who felt much better during distance learning.

The better well-being of every fourth student in remote education indicates their specific educational needs and the problems they encountered while attending school. Perhaps they are related to difficulties in relationships with peers, or the very organization of the teaching-learning process.

The available reports on the pandemic are consistent with the results presented in this article and clearly show that the educational, social, emotional and psychological costs for young people are high: there was a marked decline in most students' well-being causing sadness, depression, loneliness, mental breakdown, the emergence of depressive symptoms, deterioration in the quality of peer relationships and contacts with adults (see Bigaj and Dębski, 2020; Buchner and Wierzbicka, 2020; Długosz, 2020; Jagielska, 2020; Makaruk et al., 2020; Pyżalski, 2020; Grzelak and Żyro, 2021). According to the survey held during the World Youth Competence Development Day 2021 conducted by Ipsos, the deterioration of mental health and well-being in children and adolescents as a result of the pandemic should be classified as a long-term effect that may contribute to the increase of risky and problematic behaviors, i.e. cyberbullying, behavioral addictions, or the use of psychoactive substances (Ipsos, 2021).

Students returning to school after the pandemic should be covered by psychological and pedagogical support and intensified educational activities aimed primarily at integrating class groups. As the presented research has shown, high self-esteem is a factor that "protects" students' well-being and contributes to their higher well-being. This is especially important in a difficult situation, such as the pandemic, therefore, schools, teachers and class teachers should, *inter alia*, focus

on increasing students' self-esteem to help them better cope with negative emotions. They should also thoroughly educate young people about physical and psychosocial changes occurring during adolescence, and offer social skills training.

The presented research showed that there are students who feel better in remote education and it is not related to the level of their self-esteem. Therefore, it is necessary to deepen the exploration in this area in order to find the causes and, above all, to consider the needs and problems of this group of students.

Polish schools faced a global crisis they were in no way prepared for. On the one hand, it is impossible to predict such situations, on the other, this experience has shown how important it is to react quickly and adapt to changing conditions, because the sluggishness in terms of effective education and upbringing impacts the youngest members of our society. Not only teaching but most of all upbringing students is significant in such situations. Therefore, in addition to introducing classes in "practical psychology" for students, it is necessary to develop the best standards in planning and organizing remote and hybrid education. There is no other way here, except for the diligent preparation of teaching staff and providing the schools with the necessary equipment.

A significant deterioration in the students' well-being, their mental health, the lack of systemic solutions for supporting students and their families, organizational chaos, leaving schools to deal with the problem of distance learning on their own are just some of the problems that Polish education experienced during the pandemic. It will struggle with the consequences of this situation for a very long time. Taking into account the dynamics of the changes taking place related to the coronavirus, we do not know what education will look like in the near future. Students can say that adults failed in several areas: the inability to react quickly, the lack of functioning new technologies in schools at the beginning of the pandemic, the lack of support for students at this difficult time for them, and the lack of lessons with the class teacher (see Buchner and Wierzbicka, 2020; *Edukacja zdalna...*, 2020; Grzelak and Żyro, 2021; Ptaszek et al., 2020). We should accept this assessment and consider how to improve. We should draw conclusions from our experiences, help children and adolescents to cope with the negative consequences of the pandemic, and prepare for a quick and effective response to any experienced difficult or crisis situation.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

The conducted research and obtained results should be treated with caution. The research was conducted using a Google form and we received a relatively small number of completed questionnaires. This resulted in some limitations in generalizing the results. Another limitation is that the study did not cover the entire peri-



od of the pandemic, as it was conducted in 2020. In addition, it would be advisable to conduct research again in the post-pandemic period using a richer arsenal of psychological and sociological tools in order to conduct analyzes focused on the psychosocial functioning of the students after their return to physical classrooms at school.

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## SAMOOCENA I SZKOLNE SAMOPOCZUCIE UCZNIÓW W CZASIE PANDEMII

**Wprowadzenie:** Pandemię koronawirusa jako zdarzenie nagłe, zaskakujące, budzące silne emocje i dezorganizujące życie należy analizować w kategoriach kryzysu. To, w jaki sposób młodzi ludzie przeżywają sytuację kryzysową, zależy od nadawania przez nich znaczenia i wagi danemu wydarzeniu (pozytywne – negatywne – ambiwalentne, ważne – nieważne) i subiektywnego poziomu obciążenia psychicznego.

**Cel badań:** W niniejszym artykule zaprezentowano badania własne dotyczące poziomu samooceny i szkolnego samopoczucia uczniów w czasie trwania pandemii COVID-19. Badania przeprowadzono online wśród uczniów klas VII i VIII szkół podstawowych oraz I klas szkół ponadpodstawowych województwa lubelskiego.

**Metoda badań:** W badaniach wykorzystano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego.

**Wyniki:** Pomiar samooceny wskazuje, że zdecydowana większość badanych uczniów prezentuje wysoki i średni poziom samooceny. Zmiennymi różnicującymi w sposób istotny statystycznie samoocenę okazały się być: płeć, wiek i klasa szkolna. Na skutek trwającej ponad rok izolacji społecznej związanej z epidemią koronawirusa sukcesywnie pogarszało się samopoczucie badanych uczniów. Otrzymane wyniki wskazują na istnienie związku między poziomem samooceny badanej młodzieży a jej samopoczuciem w szkole przed i w trakcie pandemii.

**Wnioski:** Konieczne jest objęcie wsparciem psychicznym i pedagogicznym wszystkich uczniów, bez względu na to w jakiej znajdują się aktualnie kondycji psychicznej. Ponadto należy wprowadzić rozwiązania systemowe, które z jednej strony będą w możliwie najlepszy sposób przygotowywać instytucje edukacyjne i podmioty odpowiedzialne za ten proces do pracy zdalnej i hybrydowej, a z drugiej będą dbać o zachowanie równowagi między nauczaniem a wychowaniem uzupełnianym o profilaktykę.

**Słowa kluczowe:** samoocena, szkolne samopoczucie, uczeń, pandemia COVID-19.