



„Wychowanie w Rodzinie” t. XXX (4/2023)

nadesłany: 22.09.2023 r. – przyjęty: 29.11.2023 r.

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## **An unexpected return to the nest. Young Polish people in tertiary education residing with their parents due to the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Nieoczekiwany powrót do gniazda. Polska młodzież akademicka zamieszkująca z rodzicami w związku z pandemią**

### **Abstract**

**Aim.** The COVID-19 pandemic has caused various changes in the lives of academic youth. The closure of universities, the transition to distance education, limited social interactions and difficulties in the labour market often resulted in decisions to return to the family home

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and live with their parents again. This change generated subsequent transformations in various areas of the students' functioning. The considerations undertaken in this article were devoted to the analysis of the specific functioning of students living with their parents again during a pandemic, based on the results of the team's own research, as well as a review of other research carried out during this period with the participation of students.

**Methods and materials.** The study was conducted using an online survey questionnaire on a sample of 1, 215 students of Polish universities from February to November 2020. The research results revealed that the surveyed young students who returned to their family home during the pandemic experienced a decline in civic engagement, spiritual life, activities related to professional career development, and deterioration of their interpersonal relationships.

**Results and conclusion.** The considerations made in the article seem to be justified because they may help determine the psychophysical condition, relationships with parents, and economic, educational, and professional conditions of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will enable the implementation of appropriate actions and preventive programs to support this social group in adapting to functioning in the new pandemic (and post-pandemic) reality and counteracting difficulties, fears, and anxieties related to life changes expected in the future.

**Keywords:** young people, lockdown, polish students, research on COVID-19, returning to the family home, nesters, COVID-19 global pandemic.

### **Abstrakt**

**Cel.** Pandemia COVID-19 wywołała różne zmiany w życiu młodzieży akademickiej. Zamknięcie szkół wyższych, przejście na edukację zdalną, ograniczone interakcje społeczne oraz trudności na rynku pracy skutkowały nierzadko decyzjami o powrocie do domu rodzinnego oraz ponownym zamieszkaniu z rodzicami. Niniejsza zmiana generowała kolejne, liczne przeobrażenia w różnorodnych obszarach funkcjonowania studentek. Rozważania podjęte w niniejszym artykule zostały poświęcone analizie specyfiki funkcjonowania młodzieży akademickiej ponownie zamieszkującej z rodzicami w okresie pandemii COVID-19 w oparciu o uzyskane wyniki własnych badań zespołowych, jak i również przegląd innych eksploracji badawczych przeprowadzonych w tym okresie z udziałem studentów.

**Metody i materiały.** Badanie przeprowadzone zostało za pomocą internetowego kwestionariusza ankiety na próbie 1215 studentek i studentów polskich uczelni wyższych w terminie od lutego do listopada 2020. Wyniki badań ujawniły, że u badanej młodzieży akademickiej, która powróciła do domu rodzinnego na czas pandemii nastąpił spadek w zaangażowanie obywatelskie, życie duchowe, aktywności związane z rozwijaniem kariery zawodowej oraz pogorszenie jej relacji interpersonalnych.

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**Wyniki i wnioski.** Rozważania podjęte w artykule wydają się być zasadne, ponieważ mogą być pomocne przy określeniu kondycji psychofizycznej, relacji z rodzicami oraz warunków ekonomicznych i edukacyjno-zawodowych studentek oraz studentów w warunkach pandemii COVID-19. Umożliwi to wdrożenie odpowiednich działań oraz programów profilaktycznych wspierających niniejszą grupę społeczną w adaptacji do funkcjonowania w nowej rzeczywistości pandemicznej (jak również postpandemicznej) oraz przeciwdziałających trudnościom, lękom, obawom związanym ze zmianami życiowymi przewidywanymi w przyszłości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, lockdown, polscy studenci, przegląd badań nad COVID-19, powrót do domu rodziców, gniazdownicy, pandemia COVID-19.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unexpected and dynamic changes in people's life situations. The scale and extent of the changes related to the spread of the SARS-CoV-02 virus were highly significant.

It is worth emphasizing that due to the global nature of the pandemic, its effects have not been restricted by geographical boundaries. The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic has become the experience of people living in many countries, including Poland (more in: Common, 2021). Another feature is its universal character as its effects are felt by every social group, regardless of age, role, or social status (Drozdowski et al., 2020).

Young students have not been spared the experience of an unstable personal, economic, or professional situation (Chirikov, Soria, Horgos, & Jones-White, 2020) resulting from generally imposed restrictions related to preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as from the threat to life and health, and changes in the functioning of educational institutions, including universities.

Following the Polish government's decision, full-time classes at schools and universities were suspended from March 16, 2020. It was observed that one of the immediate effects was the return of students to their family homes (Kajta, Pustulka, & Radzińska, 2023; Preetz, Greifenberg, Hülsemann, & Filser, 2022; Vehkalahti, Armila, & Sivenius, 2021). Re-settling with parents was not without significance for the functioning of students, also in other areas of activity, such as social life, entertainment, or employment (Branquinho, Gomez-Baya, & Gaspar de Matos, 2020; Długosz, 2020; Myszka-Strychalska, Marcinek, Karmolińska-Jagodzik, Kanclerz, & Peret-Drażewska, 2022) and the quality of their relationship with their parents (Karmolińska-Jagodzik, Bartkowiak, 2021).

The research issues addressed in the article are part of this discourse of analysis of the functioning of academic youth in the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. The

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timeliness of this issue should be emphasized as the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are still being felt today, generating an accumulation of difficulties, and starting a cycle of cause-and-effect relationships that is difficult to stop. In the public debate and scientific discourse, there are questions about what the post-pandemic reality will be like and what challenges it will bring for a young individual participating in it (Dymecka, 2021; Zakaria, 2021).

The primary purpose of this article is to analyse the research results on the specificity of functioning of young persons in education residing with their parents again during the COVID-19 pandemic. These considerations are justified because they can help determine the psychophysical condition, relationships with parents, and students' economic, educational, and professional conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will enable the implementation of appropriate measures and preventive programs supporting this social group in adapting to functioning in the new (post) pandemic reality and counteracting difficulties, fears, and anxieties related to life changes expected in the future. It is worth noting that most of the research conducted before and during the pandemic focuses on analysing the reasons for students returning to their family homes (Belghith, Ferry, Patros, & Tenret, 2020; Berngruber, 2021; Houle, Warner, 2017; Piszczatowska-Oleksiewicz, 2014; Stone, Berrington, & Falkingham, 2014), but only a few focus on its consequences for various areas of youth activity.

The considerations undertaken in the research paper are justified as they can help determine the psychophysical condition, relationships with parents, and economic, educational, and professional conditions of students during the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will enable the implementation of appropriate measures and preventive programs supporting this social group in adapting to functioning in the new pandemic (as well as post-pandemic) reality and counteracting difficulties, fears, and anxieties related to life changes expected in the future.

## **The functioning of academic youth during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Academic youth is a group of young adults who have active student status. This stage is particular due to the specificity of the development tasks applying to it and their importance for the future fate of the individual. The psychosocial developmental specificity of early adulthood assumes "learning to be an adult" and having a perspective of long-term functioning in adulthood, which is not without significance for life goals and defining plans for the future (Oleś, 2011).

In light of the above attributes of early adulthood, academic youth struggling with the uncertainty of existence faces the task of reorganizing life plans for the future (Arnett, 2004; Klimkowska, 2016). Its constitutive feature is the postponement of tasks

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belonging to adulthood: starting a family, taking up a job, and achieving economic independence. The “emerging adulthood” stage emphasizes the orientation of this developmental period towards adulthood because it concerns phenomena and processes assigned to adulthood but not yet implemented (Arnett, 2004). According to Michelle F. Weinberger, Jane R. Zavisca, and Jennifer M. Silva the period of adulthood, including academic studies, should be perceived as a different phase in the life cycle, indicating the individualization of the process of assuming commitments characteristic of adulthood and a change in the order of implementation of developmental tasks (Weinberger, Zavisca, & Silva 2017). On the other hand, studies by Koen Luyckx, Seth J. Schwartz, Luc Gossens, and Sophie Pollock (2008) show that students declare a sense of adulthood less often than people taking up roles typical of adulthood, such as work. Therefore, one of the reasons for this state of affairs can be found in the lengthening of education.

The conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted university students’ daily functioning, quality of life, and mental condition. The time of studies is a period of particularly intense social life, searching for a life partner, which results from the specific developmental stage of early adulthood. The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic made implementing these development tasks much more difficult. Faced with the need to suddenly adapt to hitherto unknown rules of life, experiencing fear for one’s own health/life and that of the loved ones, and having to deal with the unpredictability of the future, pandemic conditions can be recognized as a factor generating a mental crisis in individuals (Babicki, Mastalerz-Migas, 2020). This state is a consequence of the fact that one is going through such a complex event, the problem of which becomes unsurmountable due to the lack of sufficient resources for effective coping. A characteristic feature of being in a crisis is its impact on the further direction of the individual’s development (Gilliland, James, 2006).

Being faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis steeped in anxiety, fear, and uncertainty, students reflected on the predictions regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on plans and life changes (Skalski, 2021). Bearing in mind the psychosocial specificity of academic youth functioning and early adulthood developmental tasks (Przetacznik-Gierowska, Tyszkowa, 1996), it is worth emphasizing that these changes required special skills to adapt to the existing pandemic conditions and to consider their impact on life transformations and future fate.

The situation of young people during the pandemic reality is described in several research reports that analyse detailed issues related to the functioning of students in the era of the SARS-CoV-02 virus threat. The changes they experience during this period concern various aspects of their functioning, but they are most often observed at three levels, i.e., in the area of professional activity in the labour market, education, and interpersonal interactions (Mascherini, Campajola, 2020), as well as experiencing difficult emotions and anxiety (Cao et al., 2020), disturbances in the rhythm of every-

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day life, and the deterioration of mental health (Chirikov et al., 2020; Marques, Drissi, Torre-Dias, Sainz de Abajo, & Ouhbi, 2020).

## **Returning home during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Due to the prolonged period of residence of children in the family home, young adults who still share the household with their parents were termed “socket dwellers” (Piszczatowska-Oleksiewicz, 2014). In effect, an extended relationship with parents has been observed, referred to as a crowded nest, i.e., a Crowded nest/Cluttered nest (Boyd, Norris, 1999). American sociologist Kathleen Shaputis (2003) first used the term nesting in *The Crowded Nest Syndrome: Surviving the Return of Adult Children* (Shaputis, 2003). Subsequently, this term has been in constant use in scientific sociological analyses.

In Poland, in 2021, 64.2% of young people aged 18 and 34 were found to be living with their parents (or at least one of them) (in 2019, this percentage was 58.9%), which places this country in one of the highest levels in the European Union (the average level for the European Union countries was 49.4%) (Eurostat, 2021). During the pandemic, a large group of academic youth (up to 75%) was forced to change their place of residence (usually it involved returning to their family home or living with their immediate family) (Góra et al., 2020; Myszka-Strychalska, 2021).

Considering the causes of nesting, two groups of sources of these decisions seem to be dominant: first, individual personal choices – nesting, conscious, desirable; secondly, nesting as an unintended, sometimes even undesirable effect of the economic, professional, educational, or life situation (Piszczatowska-Oleksiewicz, 2014).

The consequence of the pandemic reality characterized by the transition to remote study mode, problems in the professional and financial sphere was often the reason behind the decision to return to the family home and use their parents’ financial support. It is also worth emphasizing that there occurred a change in young people’s relationship with their parents during the pandemic, including, in particular, a deterioration of their contact with their mothers (Karmolińska-Jagodzik, Bartkowiak, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the difficulties in starting a life independent of parents, which is determined by housing independence. However, whether young people perceive their housing situation as stable and safe depends on factors such as age, economic situation, social support, and (in) housing stability from the time before the pandemic (Kajta et al., 2023).

The time of leaving the family home by young people has been significantly delayed in the last few decades, which is associated, among other things, with the transformation of their life aspirations, value system, educational conditions, economic difficulties, and institutional solutions (Aassve, Billari, Mazzuco, Ongaro, 2007; Kargul, 2017;

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Kokociński, 2017; Sironi, Rosina, 2015). The situation of the pandemic and the related re-settlement of students with their parents may further delay their decision to start an independent life (Luppi, Rosina, & Sironi, 2021), postpone the willingness to make commitments characteristic of adulthood, extend the moratorium period, and shape a mature identity (Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2009; Sica, Aleni Sestito, & Ragozini, 2014), and thus intensify the phenomena of nesting (Johnson, Wilkinson, 1995), emerging adulthood (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014), or kidults (Bernardini, 2014).

Young people should receive support in developing the ability to adapt to the uncertain conditions of the modern reality and cope with the multitude of changes and life difficulties. The publication and popularization of knowledge on this subject, and the presentation of specific detailed advice, should be a common practice of universities in the (post)pandemic reality, out of concern for the psychophysical well-being of students.

## Methods

### *Procedure*

This article presents the collected empirical material on the return to the family home of people participating in the study, attempting to answer the question: “What changes in the areas of professional career, family and peer relationships, spirituality, and civic commitment occurred in the young people who moved back to live with their parents due to the pandemic and what variables differentiate them?”\*.

A diagnostic survey was used to collect statistical data and facts related to the phenomenon, namely, the characteristics of academic youth residing with their parents again due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn made it possible to determine the range, intensity, and scope of these modifications. The study was quantitative, which made it possible to relatively accurately determine the scale and size of the changes during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by subjecting them to statistical processing.

The CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) online survey was used in the survey. Due to the specificity of the situation, this was the only possible way of conducting the study. The authors of this study are aware of the limitations resulting from both the method of distribution of the survey and that of narrowing down the group of

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\* The project was implemented at the Faculty of Educational Studies of the University of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań as part of the research group “Youth – social changes – contemporary times” by a team of Dr Mateusz Marcinak, prof. Adam Mickiewicz from University in Poznań, Dr Ewa Karmolińska-Jagodziak, Dr Lucyna Myszka-Strychalska, Dr Bożena Kanclerz, and Dr Paulina Peret-Drażewska.

respondents to people who are more willing to participate in this type of research. The result of such an organization of conducted explorations is the need for the representativeness of the collected empirical material. The conducted analyses are exploratory. The ZOHO portal was used for their implementation, taking into account, among other things, the data protection and anonymity of people completing the questionnaire. The study used a purpose-random sample selection – they were students at universities in Poland. The research tool was disseminated through Student Service Offices at selected universities in Poland that agreed to participate in the study.

The survey questionnaire had been distributed among students since April 2, 2020. Therefore, the respondents completed the questionnaire in the period of the greatest fear and crisis, living in great uncertainty, and experiencing a need to adapt to several restrictions and changes.

The research project concerned Polish academic youth, so the respondents were people with a student status. The research sample selection was both purposeful and random (deliberate selection of people with the status of a student, while the selection of representatives of this group was random).

The dependent and independent variables reviewed in the research exploration process are listed in the table below.

Table 1  
*Dependent and independent variables used in the study*

Tool	Source	Variables/Indicators	Justification for selection
The authors' survey	The authors' survey	The dependent variables presented in the article: type of change as a result of moving back in with parents due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the areas of professional career, family, and peer relationships, spirituality, and civic engagement.	Measurement, determination of the type of change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Variables will be used in the process of exploring selected problem areas and demonstrating the relationship with independent variables.
Socio-demographic variables	Identity questions used in the area of public health and specific in connection with COVID-19	Independent variables: age, subject studied, type of university, mode of study, place of origin, main place of residence during	Characteristics of the study group. Variables will be used as criteria for intergroup comparisons in the population.



Tool	Source	Variables/Indicators	Justification for selection
		studies before the pandemic, the need to live with parents again, partner situation, being a parent, professional situation, and activities undertaken by the respondents for the development of their own professional career during the COVID-19 pandemic.	

*Source:* Authors' own study.

Specific statistical procedures were selected and applied to identify and capture relationships between variables. The threshold level of statistical significance was  $p \leq 0.05$ , which is commonly accepted in social sciences (a result below this value is considered statistically significant). The chi-square test was used to verify differences in the values of the analysed measurement scales.

### ***Participants***

A total group of 1, 215 people participated in the study. The respondents were studying full-time (70.9%, N=862), and part-time (29.1%, N=353), throughout Poland. The vast majority (91.7%, N=1115) were students at public schools; the rest were studying at non-public schools (8.3%, N=100). They were mainly students of humanities (38.9%, N=472) and social sciences (53.6%, N=652); other disciplines represented by the students included the sciences and natural sciences (2.5%, N=31), medical (2.2%, N=27), engineering, and technical fields of study (1.5%, N=18), as well as those related to the arts (1.2%, N=15).

The respondents' ages ranged from 21 to 35. Youth aged 21 and under constituted 15.5% (N=189) of the respondents, every fourth respondent was 22 years old (27.1%, N=332), every fifth 23 (22.4%, N=274), 24-year-olds accounted for 14.1%, N=173 of the research group, 25-year-olds – 9.7%, N=118, and people over 25 – 11.2%, N=125.

Almost half of the respondents (42.2%, N=513) came from rural areas, every third respondent (29.7%, N=361) indicated a small town of up to 50,000 inhabitants as their place of origin, a medium-sized city (from 50 to 200,000 inhabitants) – 14.2% (N=172) of the respondents, and the remaining people (13.9%, N=169) – large cities (over 200,000 inhabitants).

The vast majority of respondents (69.4%, N=862) were professionally active, as evidenced by the fact that almost every third respondent (27.5%, N=341) worked in a full-time employment contract, every fifth (21.1%, N=262) – on a mandate contract, and every tenth – performing seasonal (9.7%, N=121) or casual jobs (11.1%, N=138). The percentage of 30.6% of the university students declared that they did not engage in professional work.

## Results

The research results showed that 46.1% (N=569) of the respondents moved back to live with their parents due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation was experienced mainly by students under the age of 21 (64.7%, N=121) ( $\chi^2=121.410$ ;  $df=5$ ;  $p\leq 0.001$ ), who were in their early years of study, full-time students (57.0%, N=486) ( $\chi^2=13.811$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.008$ ) and at a public university (47.6%, N=537) ( $\chi^2=12.699$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p\leq 0.001$ ).

Table 2

*Moving back home of the respondents during the pandemic by year of study*

Year of study	Moving back home			
	Yes		No	
	N=	%	N=	%
1 <sup>st</sup> year of Bachelor's studies	84	54.2	71	45.8
2 <sup>nd</sup> year of Bachelor's studies	113	48.7	119	51.3
3 <sup>rd</sup> year of Bachelor's studies	216	44.1	274	55.9
1 <sup>st</sup> year of Master's studies	89	48.1	96	51.9
2 <sup>nd</sup> year of Master's studies	53	34.6	100	65.4
		$\chi^2$	df	p
Statistical analysis	Pearson's chi-square test	13.811	4	0.008

Source: Authors' own study.

The results demonstrate that the respondents from villages (50.9%, N=264) and small towns with up to 50,000 inhabitants (48.2%, N=174) did not return to the nest ( $\chi^2=36.928$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p\leq 0.001$ ) which was also indicated for those living in a dormitory

(70.3%, N=156) and renting a flat before the pandemic (44.4%, N=146) ( $\chi^2=92.523$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p\leq 0.001$ ), being in an informal relationship (57.1%, N=253) and those being single (56.8%, N=256) ( $\chi^2=160.111$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p\leq 0.001$ ) and those without children (49.0%, N=561) ( $\chi^2=53.088$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p\leq 0.001$ ). Interesting cognitive observations about the respondents can be made by analysing their employment conditions. It turns out that the respondents undertaking seasonal and casual work without a contract or not having employment returned to their family home more often than people working based on an employment contract.

Table 3

*Moving back home of the respondents during the pandemic and their professional activity*

Professional activity	Moving back home			
		Yes	No	
	N=	%	N=	%
Work under an employment contract	77	22.9	258	77.1
Contract work	110	42.9	146	57.1
Seasonal work	79	67.5	38	32.5
Occasional work without a contract	79	58.5	56	41.5
No employment	221	59.1	153	40.9
		$\chi^2$	df	p
Statistical analysis	Pearson's chi-square test	129.049	4	0.000

*Source:* Authors' own study.

The experience of returning to the family home was significant for various areas of functioning of the academic youth from Poland included in the survey. The research results revealed that people who lived with their parents showed lower initiative related to the development of their professional careers than the young people who did not have to change their place of residence due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is evidenced by the fact that online professional activity in the form of, e.g., e-learning courses, webinars, and running a blog was initiated by 7.9% of the respondents living alone, while the percentage was almost half of that – 3.6% for those who undertook it

while staying at home. A similar regularity can be observed when starting any job that was possible during the pandemic. Also, people returning to their family homes decided to suspend their professional activity more often than those staying in their places of residence. The academic youth who lived with their parents during the pandemic presented a lower level of social capital ( $\chi^2=14.342$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.006$ ) and decision-making capital ( $\chi^2=28.127$ ;  $df=5$ ;  $p\leq 0.001$ ) than those who stayed at their previous place of residence\*. This means they are distinguished by less developed interpersonal competencies, such as establishing and maintaining social relationships, team cooperation, networking, and being responsible for independent decision-making based on their own independent and critical judgments (Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015).

Table 4

*Activities undertaken in the area of professional career by the respondents during the pandemic and their moving back home*

Activities in the area of professional career		Moving back home				Statistical analysis – Pearson’s chi-square test		
		Yes		No		$\chi^2$	df	p
		N=	%	N=	%			
taking up a job that can be performed during the pandemic	Yes	133	28.1	341	71.9	21.086	1	0.000
	No	225	41.9	312	58.1			
suspension of professional activity due to the pandemic	Yes	128	27.1	114	21.2	4.838	1	0.028
	No	345	72.9	425	78.8			
initiating professional activity online (e.g., blogging, webinars)	Yes	17	3.6	43	7.9	8.373	1	0.004
	No	454	96.4	501	92.1			

*Source:* Authors’ own study.

\* The results of the research revealed that the academic youth who lived with their parents again present a lower level of social and decision-making capital than those who did not return to their family home. This statement refers to the research question regarding the type of activities undertaken by students to develop their professional careers during the pandemic. It was inspired by the concept of professional capital by Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves (2012), which was developed with the teaching profession in mind. However, it can be successfully applied to anyone striving to achieve mastery in a given profession. In its assumption, professional capital is a result of human capital, social capital, and decisional capital.

The respondents who moved back in with their parents more often perceived changes in their professional career in terms of difficulties (55.6%, N=30) than opportunities (21.6%, N=8) ( $\chi^2=10.396$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p\leq 0.001$ ). Difficulties in a career are understood here as fear of the future in the post-pandemic reality, e.g., related to problems with finding a job, problems with one's health, and complicated emotions (fear and a sense of uncertainty), the need to suspend some professional activities such as volunteering or apprenticeships and decrease in motivation to work and minimization of expectations about the place of employment. Returning to the family home also became a barrier to implementing professional plans for some students.

It is difficult to say unequivocally whether the changes in family relationships of the people returning to their family homes as a result of the pandemic were beneficial or not because 59.1% of the respondents perceived them through the prism of deterioration, and 40.9% see them as improving. However, a statistically significant relationship can be noted between the respondents' subjective assessment of their involvement in ties with their parents and the need to live with them ( $\chi^2=10.541$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.005$ ). It turns out that the relatively higher involvement in a given zone they declared, the more often decided to return to the nest during the pandemic. Many respondents emphasized that living with their parents contributed to the deterioration of relations with them, which was reflected in emerging conflicts and moving away from each other. Some students pointed out the difficulties with re-adaptation to the rules prevailing in family homes.

Table 5

*Subjective assessment of the respondents' relations with parents due to their moving back home during the pandemic*

Involvement of respondents in relations with parents	Moving back home			
	Yes		No	
	N=	%	N=	%
Low	100	38.2	162	61.8
Mediocre	216	48.0	234	52.0
High	214	50.6	209	49.4
Statistical analysis	Pearson's chi-square test	$\chi^2$ 10.541	df 2	p 0.005

Source: Authors' own study.

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The people declaring an improvement in their relationship with their parents appreciated the opportunity to spend more time with each other. Based on some of the statements, one can get the impression that the paradox of the pandemic situation was that the possibility for students to maintain long-distance contact with their parents contributed to the improvement of mutual relations.

The students who had returned to live with their parents more often noticed the deterioration of their relationship with their partner (spouse) (51.2%, N=21) than those who indicated an improvement (31.1%, N=19) ( $\chi^2=4.144$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.042$ ).

Returning to the family home also turned out to be unfavourable for the peer relations of the university students included in the survey, as they declared breaking off many of their relationships due to the lack of direct contact (23.0%, N=110) ( $\chi^2=6.113$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.013$ ). This situation affected them more often than it did for those who did not return to the nest (16.8%, N=92).

The research results also showed that respondents returning to their family homes more often indicated a decrease (56.8%, N=25) than an increase (43.2%, N=19) in their spirituality ( $\chi^2=5.414$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.020$ ). In addition, the university students living with their parents again declared feeling more fears and anxieties related to long social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic (51.2%, N=268) than respondents staying in other places of residence (48.8%, N=255) ( $\chi^2=9.308$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.010$ ). A similar observation can be made about their civic engagement. It turned out that returning to the family home reduced their activities undertaken in this sphere of functioning (decrease – 56.7%, N=17; increase – 31.5%, N=17) ( $\chi^2=5.077$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.024$ ).

## Discussion

The analyses conducted in the study showed that the experience of staying at a family home during a pandemic was related, among other factors, to its demographic characteristics and socioeconomic status. It mainly concerned the students under the age of 21, studying full-time at public universities, coming from small towns, without stable employment conditions. The research results showed that the respondents who had returned to their family home experienced a decrease in civic engagement, spiritual life, activities related to the development of a professional career, and the perception of changes related to it mainly through the prism of difficulties. In addition, the deterioration of their partner/marital and peer relationships were observed, and the declarations of the majority of the respondents indicated a deterioration of relations with their parents. These data justify the conclusion that living with parents again did not cause any beneficial changes in the indicated areas of activity in the students included in the survey.

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The results obtained from the study correspond with other research reports in these areas. During the pandemic, there was a deterioration in the relationship with their parents of academic youth who returned to their family home (Karmolińska-Jagodzik, Bartkowiak, 2021), with friends from college (Długosz, 2020; Elmer, Mephram, & Stadtfeld, 2020), peers (Myszka-Strychalska, 2021), and in intimate relationships (*Uniwersytet Warszawski* [University of Warsaw], 2022). It is worth bearing in mind that relational maturity, expressed, among other things, in building partner relationships based on mutual respect with parents, is one of the essential indicators of adulthood (Sharon, 2016). The re-settlement of academic youth with their parents during the pandemic made this process more difficult due to the need for them to re-adapt to the rules prevailing in family homes, which in many cases resulted in increased arguments (Hall, Zygmunt, 2021) and complex emotions (Vehkalahti et al., 2021). Instead of experiencing the development of autonomy and shaping their lifestyle, students again became dependent on their parents.

Academic youth returning to their family homes are concerned about their future related to their professional career to a greater extent than, for example, the implementation of their educational plans (Aristovnik, 2020). Due to the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic, they have experienced massive job losses, a decrease in the number of working hours that can be taken as a consequence of an increase in the unemployment rate (the highest among the entire population), and the number of representatives of the NEET group (neither in employment nor in education and training – which refers to young people who are not employed, not in education or training), unemployed and economically inactive, and who decided to postpone the moment of graduation (Aucejo, French, Ugalde Araya, & Zafar, 2020). Gainful employment created a chance to achieve financial independence from their parents, and, in returning to their family home, it was not only necessary for some students to resign from employment, but also reduced their activity related to the development of their professional careers. However, this situation does not necessarily contribute to their dissatisfaction (Pretz et al., 2022), as the closure of jobs has improved the well-being of some young people (Eurofound, 2021).

Disasters and social crises, which include the COVID-19 pandemic, usually mobilize young people's civic and political involvement (Grasso, Giugni, 2016; Kurer, Häusermann, Wüest, & Enggist, 2019). Their personal experiences of the disproportionate socioeconomic effects of the pandemic and the perception of the current needs of the immediate community contributed to the involvement of young people in activities for others (Lachance, 2020; Ohmer, Booth, & Farzan, 2021). However, this involvement was more sporadic than regular (Borbáth, Hunger, Hutter, & Oana, 2021). Students from villages and smaller towns most often returned to their family homes during the pandemic in Poland (Myszka-Strychalska et al., 2022). On the one hand, moving to a small town may make it challenging to participate in initiatives organized in previous

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places of residence. On the other hand, it creates an opportunity to participate in the local community and create remote forms of civic activity.

Current research shows a significant relationship between an individual's psycho-physical health and their spirituality (Koenig, 2012; Lucchetti et al., 2021). It plays a crucial role in coping with difficult situations and stress (Ebadi, Ahmadi, Ghanei, & Kazemnejad, 2009; Fardin, 2020; Hamilton, Best, Barney, Worthy, & Phillips, 2022).

The people who experienced a deterioration in their spirituality during the pandemic also indicated a decrease in well-being (Kasapoğlu, 2022; Roman, Mthembu, & Hoosen, 2020). There are studies indicating that contact with families and loved ones (even through digital technologies) was one of the strategies for reducing the adverse effects of social isolation (Galea, Merchant, & Lurie, 2020; Koenig, 2020), but none indicated whether the return to the family home affected the development or deterioration of the young people's spirituality.

The decrease in civic engagement, spirituality, interpersonal relations, or involvement in a professional career among the academic youth who returned to their family home during the pandemic may be conditioned by various factors: a decrease in motivation, deterioration of psychophysical health (Loades et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020; Rajkumar, 2020), preoccupation with other problems (e.g., conflicts with parents) (Karmolińska-Jagodzick, Bartkowiak, 2021), or deterioration of the financial situation (Eurofound, 2021; Grodzicki et al., 2020; Myszka-Strychalska et al., 2022), duties related to remote education (Długosz, 2020), a decrease in trust in other people (More in Common, 2021), a sense of loss of control and agency (Długosz, 2020; Góra et al., 2020; Hamer, Baran, 2021), or getting used to a specific way of functioning in the family home and being isolated from their previous everyday environment (Hall, Zygmunt, 2021).

Housing independence from parents is a crucial determinant of young people's transition from adolescence to adulthood (Houle, Warner, 2017; Sharon, 2016). Losing it by returning to the family home during the pandemic may be tantamount to a regression in development and have negative implications for various areas of young people's lives. Polish students were forced to move back in with their parents more often than students from other countries (Grzywińska-Rapca, Duarte, & Janusz, 2021). The phenomena of nesting (Piszczałowska-Oleksiewicz, 2014), emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007), and deferred adulthood (Brzezińska, Kaczan, Piotrowski, & Rękosiewicz, 2011) signal the blurring of boundaries in the transition from adolescence to adulthood of the young people (such as setting up a family, leaving the family home, or professional training), which results in experimenting in various spheres of life and prolonging the moratorium (Liberska, 2007; Merino, Garcia, 2006). It is worth emphasizing, however, that in most cases, these regularities result from the individual decisions of young people (often also people with financial independence) (Piszczałowska-Oleksiewicz, 2014), and the situation of the pandemic in a way forced them to choose to return to



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their family home. Previous research has reported that young adults were most likely to return to their family homes because of school drop-outs, unemployment, economic problems, or the end of a partnership (Hartung, Sweeney, 1991; Stone et al., 2014). Problems related to the development of professional careers, interpersonal relations, civic engagement, and spirituality, which it caused in their lives, may therefore intensify and additionally prolong the process of postponing the moment of moving out from the family of origin, which in its long-term consequences may be dysfunctional for it and result in, for example, a decrease in life satisfaction (Parola, Rossi, Tessitore, Troisi, & Mannarini, 2022; Preetz et al., 2022), or postponing the decision to live independently (Luppi et al., 2021).

Each change in human biography may be of a developmental, regressive, or destructive nature (Matuszewska, 1997). It is difficult to clearly define the characteristics of changes in career, interpersonal relationships, civic engagement, and spiritual life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of the respondents. As with other transitional situations (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011), the changes can have unpredictable short, medium, and long-term effects. Most of them are distinguished by a negative singularity, but their final result does not have to have pejorative connotations for human existence. Some crises and difficult situations may have developmental significance and lead to a more satisfying life (Polukhina, 2018; Robinson, 2015).

## Conclusion

The text describes changes in selected areas of functioning related to the COVID-19 pandemic of the respondents and their return to the family home. The presented data point to the spheres of students' activity that require intensified support and intervention of counsellors and specialists dealing with helping them in mental health and professional career development. They can also inspire future research analysing the situation of young people during the pandemic. More insightful data would help specialists to select more accurate methods of intervention. When designing and planning assistance for academic youth in psychological and counselling services, individual experiences during the pandemic related to returning to the family home should be considered.

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