

Marlena Sokół-Szawłowska

Psychologists' reactions and working conditions during all waves of COVID-19 in Poland. Prospective study

Summary

Introduction: The work of psychologists supporting society in crisis after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had to undergo urgent and radical changes. They experienced the same epidemic overload as the general population. There have been reports that the psychological consequences of such a situation may have consequences comparable even to doctors treating COVID-19. The aim of the study was to show trends in changes at work and psychologists' response to the pandemic.

Material and methods: Data were collected during five waves of the pandemic in Poland. The online questionnaire was posted on the website of the Polish Psychiatric Association, and the number of respondents decreased (I - 341, II - 123, III - 118, IV - 67, V - 61).

Results: In the first wave, 60.4% of respondents worked with patients in a remote or hybrid mode of work (a decreasing trend, because in the fifth wave - 26.3%). At the beginning of the pandemic, 77.7% of psychologists experienced stress of medium and high intensity (a decreasing trend, but still high values, because in the 5th wave - 54.1%). The declaration of a change in the value system as a result of the pandemic was most strongly expressed during the third and fourth waves (approx. 55%), then this trend dropped to 44.3%. However, the level of anticipating changes/deterioration in one's professional life increased systematically - up to 67.2% of respondents in the last wave of the pandemic in Poland.

Conclusions: Psychologists quickly adapted to the restrictions introduced after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have replaced in-person meetings with remote or hybrid ones. At the end of the pandemic, some returned to their previous way of working. Hybrid work remained in clinical practice. Most of the respondents' fears related to the pandemic disappeared after the third wave. At the same time, however, there was a growing feeling that the pandemic would worsen/change their work. The level of subjectively experienced stress in the last wave was still alarmingly high, which may result in burnout. Further research and prevention of burnout are necessary.

Key words: psychologists; COVID-19 pandemic; working conditions; burnout;