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Social (in)security — the ambivalence of villagers' perceptions during COVID-19

Abstract

The aim of the study is to provide a subjective assessment of security in the social dimension of rural households during the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve the objective, a four-stage primary study of households in Poland was designed and conducted. Subjective assessments of households' perceptions about social security are presented. The possibility of loss of financial stability, job loss and deterioration of the household situation was assessed. The respondents also assessed the possibility of a worsening of the

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situation in the country, an increase in family poverty and an increase in unemployment in Poland. One of the most important findings is the dichotomy of the perceptions of the respondents, who assess the situation of their household better than that of the country. A different perspective on security is also provided by the rural optimism index, which can also be seen as a measure of vulnerability to social security. The considerations and analyses presented can be useful for both theoretical and practical purposes. The study improves knowledge on how households function under conditions of vulnerability. They also constitute a voice in the discussion on security in the social dimension.

Key words: social security, dichotomy of perceptions, rural households, COVID-19

Introduction

The pandemic has affected almost every person and almost every place in the world. However, it can be stated that coronavirus in Poland is more an urban than a rural disease. People living in rural areas are less likely to be affected by COVID-19. In large urban areas, vulnerability is mainly related to population density, which has necessitated the implementation of strict interventions in the form of lockdowns and social distancing practices. At the time of the pandemic, scientific research is being conducted worldwide on its human, social and economic impact. Domestic level analyses in the USA showed higher COVID-19 infection rates in urban areas compared to rural areas in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions at the beginning of the epidemic. However, over time, the intensity of the epidemic has shifted to rural areas (Cuadros et al., 2021). Agnoletti, Manganelli and Piras (2020) state that it is interesting to note that in Italy, the lower number of COVID-19 cases cannot be explained by the lower population density of these areas or by other demographic, economic or environmental features. Kerbage et al. (2021) also highlight the distinctiveness of rural areas and their needs in the face of the pandemic. It can be assumed that the reasons for the different temporal dynamics between urban and rural areas may be varied.

It is an undeniable fact that COVID-19 has changed lives around the world and has become part of Bauman's (2000) liquid modernity. In addition to the direct impact of coronavirus on health and mortality, strong social and economic constraints and disruptions should be noted. These pandemic influences are likely to have far-reaching effects on human well-being for a long time (cf. Sumner et al., 2020). Despite that, individuals as well as entire societies are looking for appropriate solutions to this difficult situation. Changes in the daily life of households, the functioning of workplaces, or teaching in schools are manifested, for example, in the reorganisation of work-life, changes in shopping habits, or the transformation of schools to distance learning. The authorities are also adapting to the current situation by trying to counteract the effects of the pandemic on both the economy and society. At the same time, there is a great deal of research related to human adaptation to a new reality during the pandemic (Akhtar, 2021; Asmundson & Taylor, 2020; Chulasiri et al., 2020; Cortes & Forsythe, 2020; Halamska, 2020; Hall et al., 2020;

Han et al., 2020; Kalinowski, 2020a; Kalinowski & Wyduba, 2020; McCarthy, 2020; Naeem, 2021; Nolting, 2020; Tavares & Betti, 2021; Zwęglińska-Gałecka, 2020). This leads to a conundrum and reflection related to the security of the rural population under conditions of uncertainty.

This article presented is part of extensive research conducted on the situation of the households during the coronavirus period. It should be added that this research is also part of the research related to living with uncertainty (cf. Beck, 2004; Kalinowski, 2014; Knight, 1921; Zalega, 2008), with the most acute problems being fears of the loss of job, income and an uncertain future. Hence, the study was designed to assess the situation of rural households in Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are various studies emerging worldwide related to rural analysis during pandemics. These studies address different aspects: health, social, economic, or psychological (Bu et al., 2020; Cuadros et al., 2021; de Luca et al., 2020; Dutta & Fischer, 2021; Jia et al., 2021; Kansime et al., 2021; Kerbage et al., 2021; Malatzky et al., 2020). Analyses of rural areas in countries such as Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, China, Lebanon, or Ecuador reveal problems related to fewer health services, weaker health and sanitation infrastructure, inadequate social protection and numerous problems in rural governance and sometimes endemic poverty (e.g., in India). In a number of countries (including Norway, the United States, Canada, Australia), the migration of people from cities to the countryside has also become a problem, as rural areas have been considered oases of safety (Malatzky et al., 2020). These factors contribute to the difficulty of handling a pandemic. Furthermore, activities are often centralised in urbanised areas, while rural and peripheral areas may be neglected (Kerbage et al., 2021). The positive aspects include that living in the rural area has been credited as a protective factor against the negative effects of loneliness during a pandemic (Bu et al., 2020). Rural areas compared to urban areas have other additional advantages that are important during a pandemic, such as lower population density, tighter social networks, more green space, and better self-sufficiency of food supply (Jia et al., 2021).

Based on the quoted studies and the extensive analysis by Haghani et al. (2020) on security, it is possible to identify gaps in the security dimensions presented. It should be noted that there is a lack of research on the perceptions of social security of the population, especially those living in rural areas. Due to these reasons, an attempt was made to identify changes in the perceptions of social security of rural households in Poland that occur during the pandemic. Against this background, the main objective of the research emerges, which is the subjective assessment of the situation of rural households regarding their security in the social dimension during the COVID-19 pandemic. Achieving the main objective was also possible through the search for answers to the following research questions:

1. Do respondents feel that the situation in Poland and in their own household could get worse?
2. Are rural households worried about poverty during the pandemic?
3. Do respondents have a sense of job security?

Three research hypotheses were also formulated indicating as follows:

- H1: In the pandemic period studied, rural households had a strong sense of the possibility of deterioration in Poland and in their own household at the same time.
- H2. The subjective perceptions of rural households about the fear of poverty increased during the pandemic period.
- H3. Respondents living in rural areas are not worried about losing their own jobs despite the possibility of increased unemployment in the country.

The verification of the stated hypotheses is based on a four-stage primary study of rural households in Poland, conducted using the CAWI (*Computer-Assisted Web Interview*) method in April, June, and September 2020 and in April 2021.

We also used the statistical methods to verify the hypotheses. The structure indicators were used to present the shares of responses of rural households about perceptions of social security. The similarity of response structures between study stages was examined using the similarity of structures index. Consistency of criterion assessment between the situation in one's own household and the situation in Poland was checked using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. We also examined optimism of rural households based on the rural optimism index.

The article is structured as follows. Section two presents a brief discussion on the definition of social security. Section three discusses data sources and research methods. Section four presents statistical findings on the households' subjective assessment of their security situation in the social dimension during the coronavirus pandemic in Poland. The final section provides a summary.

Understanding social security

In lexical terms, security is the state of not being threatened (*Dictionary of the Polish Language*, 2021) and, as stated by Ivan (2011), the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed the beginning of an extensive scientific discussion on this topic in all spheres of everyday life. The concept of security has evolved over time and today can be defined in different ways. Starting from the original and narrow definition of security in military terms, it is necessary to shift to its current broader conception. The broad meaning of the term includes security and protection against difficult situations, damage, or forced change, starting from natural events and ending with threats to a nation's independence (cf. Høyland, 2018). Gierszewski (2018) states that "a multidimensional view of security has now become the standard approach", however, it does not have a consistent definition. Webb and Wills-Herrera (2012) on the other hand, indicate that safety should address the interactions between different economic, social, political, cultural and now epidemiological systems. The last dimension, with the constantly increasing threat of disease, seems to be the most important in recent months.

Social security is one of the fundamental dimensions of human security and is closely linked to poverty and related problems. Its various definitional references can be found in the source literature "from social pathologies through social security, social assistance

or economic and social activity improving (enabling) people's livelihoods" (Gierszewski, 2018). It should also be mentioned that the Copenhagen School distinguishes between *societal security* and *social security* within social (public) security. The first is related to the society and collective identity of the country, and the second is to the single person and individual identity (Gierszewski, 2018). In the full understanding of the concept of social security, the concept of human security as freedom from distress and fear for all individuals (*Human Development Report*, 1994), as opposed to national security focusing on the defence of the whole country against various threats, is important. In this view, a person is part of the collective population of a country. It should be noted, however, that the interests of states often take precedence over the interests of their individual residents.

Social security can be defined as the "protection of the existential basis of people's lives, ensuring the possibility of satisfying individual needs (material and spiritual), the fulfilment of life aspirations by creating conditions for work and education, health protection and pension guarantees" (Skrabacz, 2012). McKay and Rowlingson (1999) define them in a slightly different way, as "all the ways in which people organise their lives in order to ensure access to an adequate income". Høyland (2018) highlights that social security is about creating favourable conditions for people to live well. In contrast, Yu and Li (2021) argue that one of the main objectives of social security is to provide "financial support to those deemed to be poor or facing the threat of poverty". Moreover, it is worth adding that the subjective feeling of security is one of the main dimensions affecting development and well-being.

The combined insights from the literature review have resulted in a definition of social security that highlights the multidimensionality of the concept. We focus on a broader definition of the household's subjective security state concerning the social dimension and propose to adopt a general definition of it as: the household's perceptions of a state of not being threatened in relation to existing socio-economic, political, cultural and epidemiological conditions. More precisely, it should be added that it is a subjective feeling of satisfaction of fundamental and essential, material and non-material needs of a household and the ability of its members to obtain financial means for their own maintenance at least at the existing living standard and ensuring the fulfilment of life aspirations irrespective of the circumstances.

Haghani et al. (2020) identified key dimensions related to safety in the COVID-19 pandemic. These relate to medical aspects, social security, food safety, mental health and home security. In contrast, there is limited research interest in economic and social security, cyber security and supply chain security. They also emphasised that more research is justified "on the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of implemented policies and legislative actions to help protect the economic safety of societies at both micro and macro levels to mitigate or manage the financial fallouts caused by the epidemic" (Haghani et al., 2020).

It should be noted that the involvement of local authorities in ensuring social security is also important. Dutta and Fischer (2021) observe that countering the COVID-19 pandemic needs to combine public health and basic social protection measures in a very

short time frame and on an unprecedented scale. Igra et al. (2021) add that the negative effect of activities that directly impact the mitigation of the effects of coronavirus on human health is that existing economic vulnerabilities and gaps in the social safety net have been exacerbated because government assistance has been limited, delayed, and unevenly distributed.

Data sources and research methods

The data used in this study are part of a research project entitled *My situation during the coronavirus period („Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa”)* (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021). The primary study was conducted using CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) method in four stages: in April, June and September 2020 and in April 2021. Due to the difficulty of direct contact with surveyed rural households during the pandemic, a computer-assisted interview using a website was used. The research sample at each stage of the study included 521 rural households represented in each voivodship in Poland. It should be added that the sample is larger than the minimum research sample size at the assumed significance level of 0.05.

Rural households were subject to self-assessment and expressed opinions on the situation in the country. The possibility of a worsening of the situation in their own households, a loss of financial stability and a loss of jobs was assessed, as well as the possibility of a worsening of the situation in Poland, an increase in family poverty and unemployment. The study used a five-point ordinal measurement scale and verbal descriptions. The measurement scale used in the study features five categories, where 1 is the most optimistic response in relation to the criterion under study and 5 is the most pessimistic statement in relation to the criterion under study. In other words, the higher the rating value, the lower the feeling of social security.

The study used structure indicators that present the shares of responses of rural households expressed on a five-point ordinal scale. The similarity of response structures between study stages was examined using the similarity of structures index (Sobczyk, 2010):

$$RSC(\mathbf{w}_t, \mathbf{w}_s) = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^P \min(w_{jt}, w_{js})}{\sum_{j=1}^P \max(w_{jt}, w_{js})} \tag{1}$$

where: $\mathbf{w}_t, \mathbf{w}_s$ — vectors of response structures in stages t and s ; $\mathbf{w}_t = [w_{1t}, w_{2t}, \dots, w_{Pt}]^T$, $\mathbf{w}_s = [w_{1s}, w_{2s}, \dots, w_{Ps}]^T$, P — number of response variants in the question. The value of the structure similarity index takes values from 0 to 1. The closer the value of the index is to 1, the greater the similarity of the response structures being compared.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) was also used to assess the consistency of criterion scores between the situation in one's own household and the situation in Poland. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is a measure of internal consistency and demonstrates what is the relationship between the criteria. The value of α should be between 0 and 1. The

higher the value of the coefficient, the greater the consistency (interrelatedness) of the assessments. Consistency is assumed if: $\alpha \geq 0.9$ — very high consistency, $0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$ — high, $0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$ — acceptable, $0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$ — questionable, $0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$ — poor, $\alpha < 0.5$ — unacceptable.

Rural optimism index (*Wskaźnik Optymizmu Wiejskiego, WOW*) values were also calculated as part of the rural household’s self-assessment of its situation and the situation in the country according to the formula (cf. Roszkowska & Jefmanski, 2021):

$$WOW_{(\bullet),t} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{p_{(\bullet)}} N_{1it}}{\sum_{i=1}^{p_{(\bullet)}} N_{1it} + \sum_{i=1}^{p_{(\bullet)}} N_{2it}} \quad (t = 1, 2, 3, 4) \quad (2)$$

where: N_{1it} — the number of rural households that commented positively (responses 1 and 2) on the i -th criterion, N_{2it} — the number of rural households that commented negatively (responses 4 and 5) on the i -th criterion, t — the stage of the study ($t = 1, 2, 3, 4$); $p_{(\bullet)}$ — the number of features within the evaluation of the own household situation (country situation); (\bullet) — (w) for own situation and (k) for the country situation. The $WOW_{(\bullet),t}$ values range from 0 to 1. The higher the value of the index, the greater the optimism of rural households.

The study assesses the perceptions of social security of rural households during the COVID-19 pandemic. Perceptions about the possibility of a worsening of the situation of their own household and the future situation in Poland were analysed. Changes in respondents’ perceptions of the possibility that their own household situation will deteriorate in the near future, that they will lose financial stability, and that they will lose their jobs were presented in four research stages. The respondents’ perceptions about the security of their own household were compared with their perceptions about the uncertainty of the future situation in Poland in terms of the possibility that the situation in the country will deteriorate in the near future, the possibility that family poverty will increase and that there will be an increase in unemployment in the country.

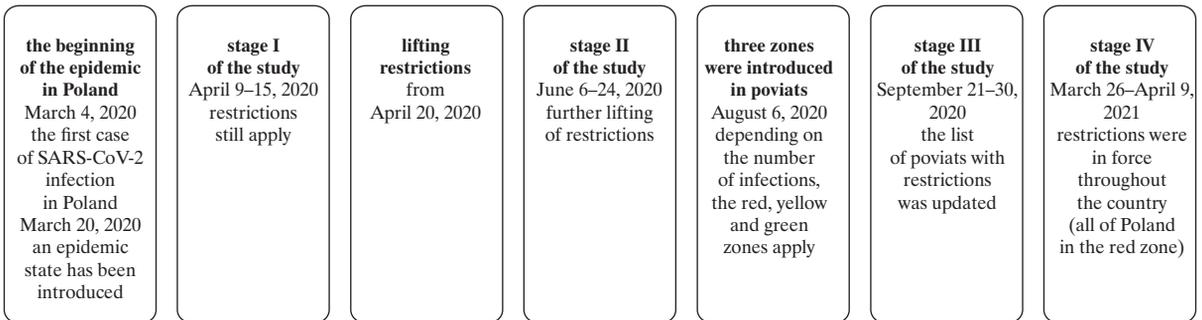


Figure 1. Stages of research in view of the situation in Poland

Source: Own work.

At the beginning of the analyses, it is worth briefly presenting the background of the situation in the country as it was during the different stages of the study (Figure 1). After the pandemic was declared, many measures were taken internationally and in Poland too to limit the spread of infection. By the time of the first stage of the study in Poland, numerous restrictions had been introduced. They were related to travel, movement and assembly. The economy was frozen, and remote learning was introduced in schools and higher education institutions. Between stages I and II, the lifting of restrictions began. During stage II, further restrictions were lifted and the economy was slowly unfrozen. In stage III of the study, the country was divided into red, yellow, and green zones with different restrictions, depending on the number of infections. In stage IV, the red area with numerous restrictions was in force throughout the country.

Research results

In April 2020 (stage I of the study), more than 44% of respondents believed that the situation in their household could worsen, while only around 19% of respondents were confident about this (Figure 2). In June (stage II of the study), the percentage of definitely pessimistic assessments decreased by more than 10 p.p. and no longer amounted to a full 8%, with almost 22% of households still feeling that their situation could get worse. In September (stage III), the share of respondents assuming that the situation of their own household could deteriorate was similar. In contrast, in April 2021 (stage IV) the group of persons who thought deterioration was possible increased to over 37%. This was compounded by another economic lockdown and the introduction of restrictions on social contact as a consequence of the increase in COVID-19 cases. It should be added that at each stage of the study, more than one in three respondents were uncertain (answers: maybe) about the direction of changes in the situation in their own household.

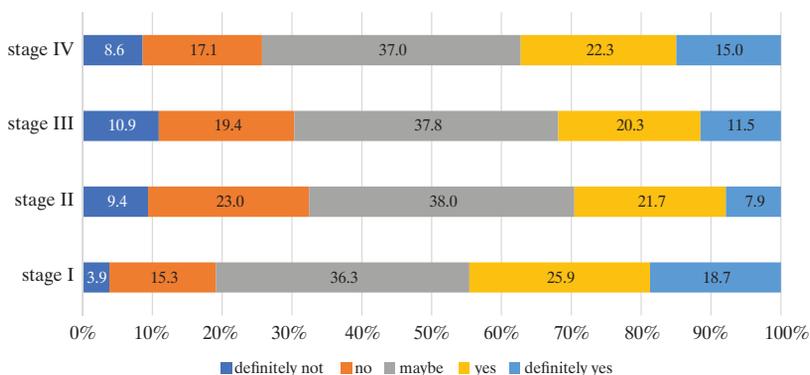


Figure 2. Respondents' perceptions of the possibility that the situation in their own household could deteriorate (%)

Source: Own workwork based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021).

It should be noted that the surveyed households in rural areas were more pessimistic about the situation in the country than about their own security. In stage I of the rural study, more than 82% of respondents (answers: yes, and definitely yes) assumed that the situation in the country would deteriorate, of which more than 57% were sure about this (Figure 3). In stage II, approximately 63% of respondents were worried about the situation deteriorating, of which only about 36% were definitely sure. The situation was similar in stage III, with 64.5% of respondents believing that the situation in the country could deteriorate, and a slight increase (by approximately 4 p.p.) in the number of people who were certain that the situation would deteriorate. In contrast, stage IV witnessed a significant deterioration in the sense of social security and a return to the mood from the beginning of the pandemic. Almost 79% of respondents felt that the situation in the country could deteriorate, of which over 56% were definitely sure.

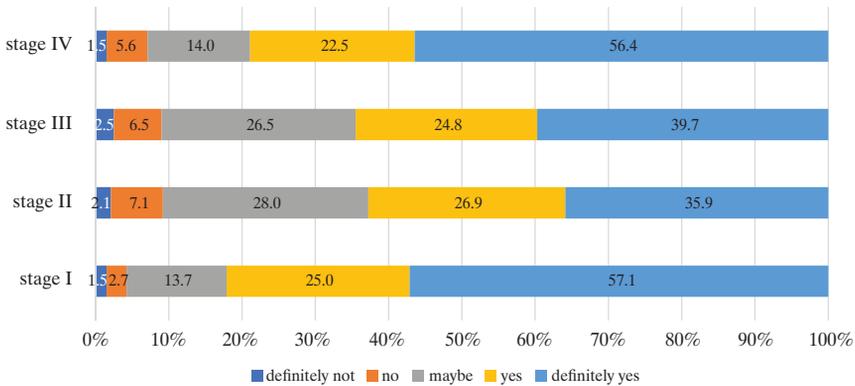


Figure 3. Respondents’ perceptions of the possibility that the situation in Poland may deteriorate (%)

Source: Own work based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („*Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa*”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021).

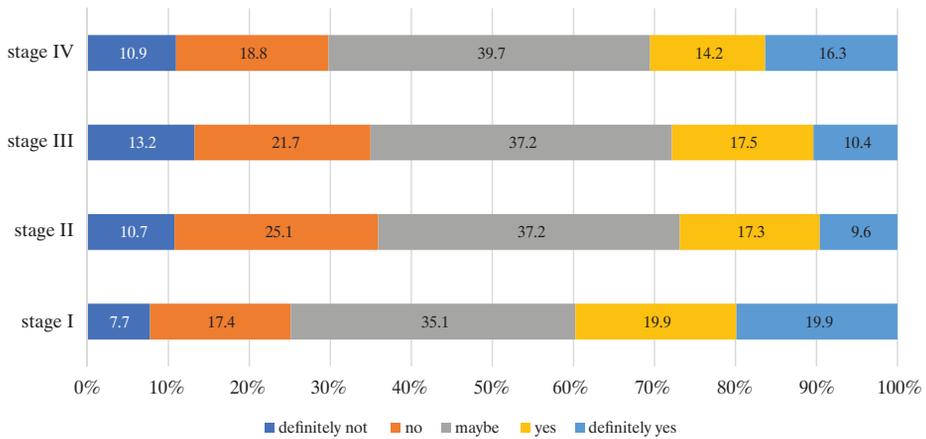


Figure 4. Respondents' perceptions of the possibility of losing financial stability in their own household (%)

Source: Own work based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („*Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa*”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021).

In terms of the possibility of losing the financial stability of one's own household in stage I of the study, approximately 40% of the respondents perceived such a possibility (Figure 4). The optimism was even greater in stages II and III, with about 27% of respondents having a negative attitude to the issue in question. After one year of the pandemic, in stage IV of the study, approximately 30% of respondents were concerned about losing the financial stability of their own household. At the same time, in each stage of the study, the percentage of respondents who were uncertain about changes in their own household situation ranged from 36–38%.

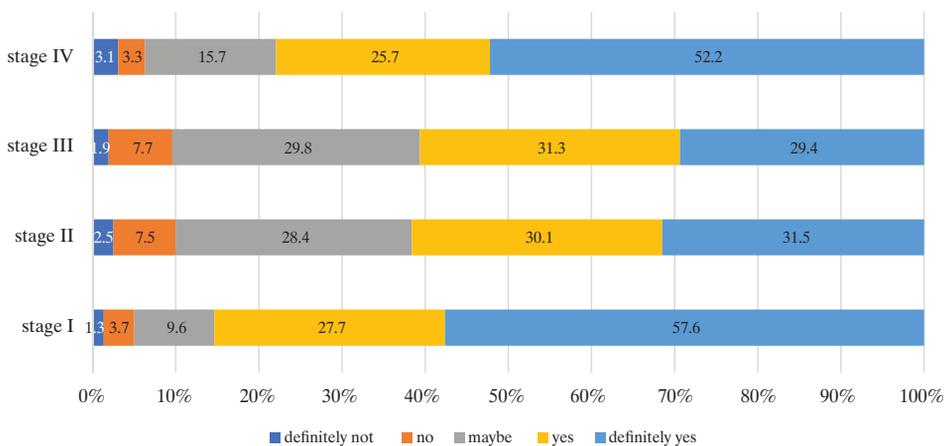


Figure 5. Respondents' perceptions of increased household poverty in Poland (%)

Source: Own work based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („*Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa*”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021).

Respondents indicated that the pandemic could significantly increase household poverty in Poland (Figure 5). In stage I, more than 85% of respondents believed that family poverty in the country would increase (answers: “yes” and “definitely yes”), with almost 58% being certain of this. In stages II and III, the situation was more optimistic and the percentage of persons who perceived that poverty could increase in the country decreased to a level of approximately 61%. In the next stage of the study, the percentage of negative evaluations increased significantly (almost 78%) returning to the level of stage I.

During a pandemic, it is also important to assess the possibility of losing one’s job, however, respondents do not perceive that this problem could affect them significantly. In stage I, only approximately 19% of respondents perceived this problem and 10.5% were certain of losing their job; in the following two stages, optimism increased and in stage II, approximately 16% felt the possibility of this problem occurring, while in stage III, this group of respondents increased by only 2 p.p. In contrast, in stage IV, which was associated with another lockdown and an increase in coronavirus cases, concerns about losing one’s job increased (over 23%).

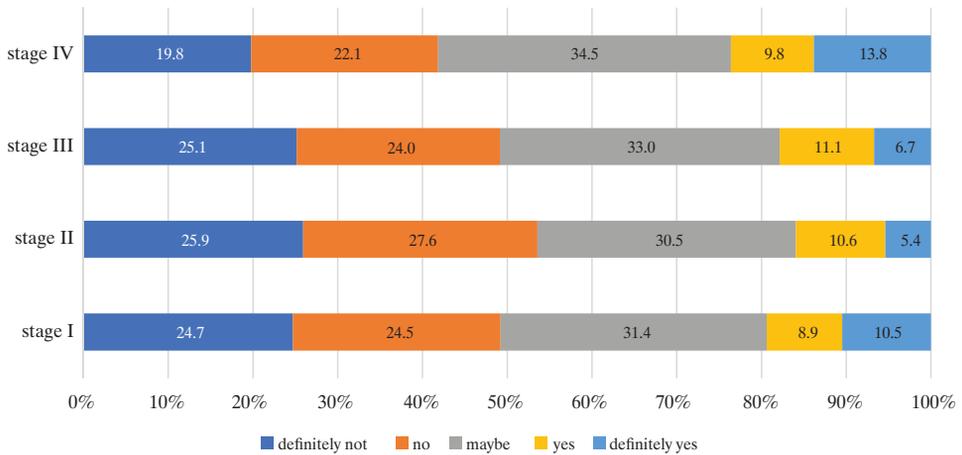


Figure 6. Respondents’ perceptions of the possibility of losing their own job (%)

Source: Own work based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021).

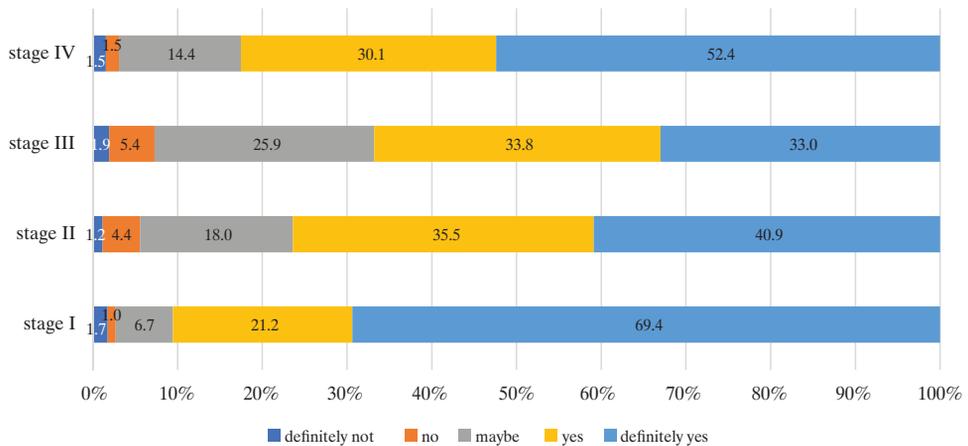


Figure 7. Respondents' perceptions of the increase in unemployment in Poland (%)

Source: Own work based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („*Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa*”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021).

It is important to note that in rural areas in stage I of the study, over 90% of respondents perceived the possibility of an increase in unemployment in the country, with over 69% of respondents confident that this would occur (Figure 7). In stage II of the study, the percentage of respondents assuming an increase in unemployment decreased by about 14 p.p. to decrease further by almost 10 p.p. in stage III. In stage IV in September, more than 82% of respondents were concerned about the increase in unemployment in the country, and about 52% of respondents were definitely sure about the increase. It is worth mentioning that in all stages more than one-third of the respondents could not assess in which direction the change would occur. It should be added that the last stage coincided with another freeze of the economy.

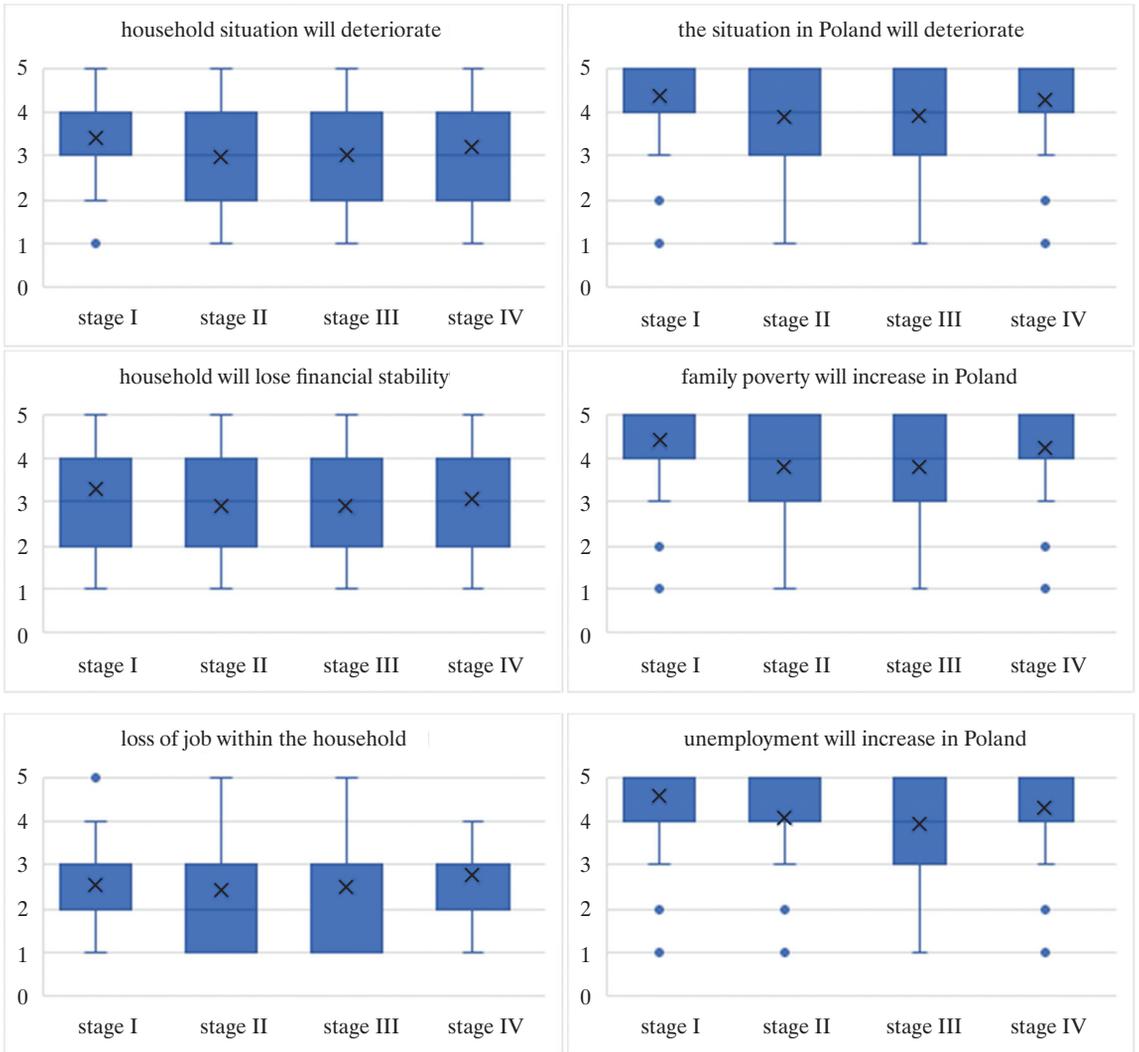


Figure 8. Box plot graphs for criteria describing the perceptions of residents living in rural areas about the future state of their own household and their opinions about the future situation in Poland in accordance with the stages of the study

Note: the box is composed of the first and third quartiles, the vertical line represents the median, × represents the mean. The width of the box corresponds to the interquartile range (*IQR*). The whiskers are drawn to the highest (lowest) value of the variable between the upper (lower) quartile and 1.5 *IQR*, small circle – data not included between the whiskers, an outlier.

Source: Own work based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („*Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa*”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021).

To confirm the dichotomy of the self-perceptions of the situation of rural households and the situation in Poland, box plot graphs (box-whisker) based on descriptive statistics were made (Figure 8). It is noteworthy that there are significant differences in the position of the box plots for the assessment of the rural household's own situation and the situation in Poland. The lower values of the positional measures for the assessment of the situation of one's own household indicate better self-assessment compared to the assessment of the situation in the country, where the ratings are higher, which means that the assessment of the situation was lower. There is an observable very high similarity in the assessments in stage II and stage III. This is evidenced by the high values of the similarity index of structures (from 0.82 to 0.95) for all examined criteria (Table 1). It should also be noted that the opinions of the respondents in stage I of the study are highly consistent with those in stage IV of the study. Almost all criteria, apart from the fear of an increase in unemployment, are very compatible between these stages, as confirmed by a value of the similarity index of structures above 0.8 (Table 1). It should also be added that between stages I and II, as well as III and IV, the similarity of answers was greater within the framework of assessing the situation of one's own household than the situation in Poland. In addition, at each stage of the study, assessments within the household's own situation and the situation in Poland were highly consistent, as confirmed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient values ranging from 0.79 to 0.85.

Table 1. Values of the similarity index of structures between stages of the study for the criteria describing the rural residents' perceptions of the future state of their own household and their opinions on the future situation in Poland

Assessment of the situation	Criterion	Stages			
		I-II	II-III	III-IV	I-IV
in one's own household	deterioration of own situation	0.74	0.90	0.90	0.86
	loss of financial stability	0.77	0.93	0.84	0.83
	job loss	0.89	0.92	0.84	0.86
in Poland	deterioration in the situation of families	0.65	0.92	0.71	0.94
	increase in poverty	0.59	0.95	0.61	0.85
	increase in unemployment	0.55	0.82	0.68	0.71

Source: Own work based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („*Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa*”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021) and the Statistica 13.3 software.

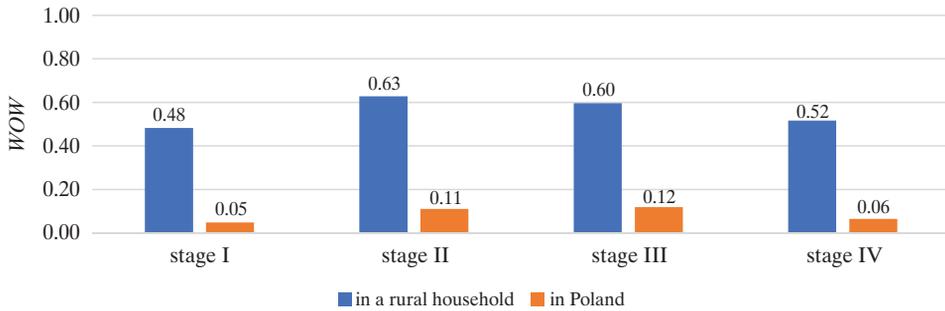


Figure 9. Rural optimism index (WOW) values as part of assessment of own household situation and situation in the country

Source: Own work based on the survey *My situation in the coronavirus period* („*Moja sytuacja w okresie koronawirusa*”) (Kalinowski, 2020b; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021).

It should be noted that the rural households under study were definitely more optimistic about their situation in terms of social security than the situation in the country. This can also be observed by the comparison of the values of the rural optimism index (Figure 9). The value of the optimism index for self-assessment of one’s own household ranged from 0.48 to 0.63 and was at an average level. On the other hand, the assessment of the situation in the country was pessimistic, as this indicator had low values ranging from 0.05 to 0.12, which indicates a very low level of optimism in the assessment of social security in the country.

Conclusions

In this paper, a subjective assessment of the social safety situation of rural households in Poland during the year of the coronavirus pandemic was undertaken. Perceptions of the future situation of their own households and opinions on the future situation in Poland were examined. Based on the research, the authors also obtained answers to the research questions posed regarding the rural population’s perceptions about the future. Surveyed rural households in Poland were quite optimistic about their situation. This may be the result of rural areas being seen as safe in a pandemic. This is confirmed in the study by Malatzky et al. (2020). It should be noted that a similar sense of security was felt by rural respondents in the study, who did not have a strong belief in the possibility of deterioration in their own household yet perceived the possibility of deterioration in the country. Moreover, especially in the first and fourth study stages the assessments were significantly worse than in the other study stages. The reasons can be attributed to the reaction to the change, as various restrictions were in place in the country at the time of these research stages. Disruption of societies has also been observed in other countries following the introduction of restrictions. Excessive purchases of food, hygiene products or personal care products were observed in most European countries.

The significantly worse perceptions in the first and fourth stages of the study allow only partial positive verification of the first research hypothesis that rural households in the studied pandemic period had a strong sense of the possibility that the situation in Poland would get worse. In contrast, the assessment of the future situation within households was positive. It is also not possible to conclude that rural households are worried about losing their own financial stability, however, respondents assessed that there may be an increase in family poverty during the pandemic period, which confirmed the second research hypothesis. Surprisingly, the self-assessment of the households' financial situation in Poland showed positive results. Studies from other countries are less optimistic. In Kenya and Uganda (Kansiime et al., 2021; Mahmud & Riley, 2021), the pandemic and associated changes have significantly affected household incomes and food security.

Moreover, the third research hypothesis should also be positively verified, as respondents living in rural areas assess their jobs as stable and are not afraid of losing their jobs despite strong perceptions of the possibility of increased unemployment in the country determined by the global economic slowdown. Research in Italy conducted by Agnoletti, Manganelli and Piras (2020) has shown that provinces with a higher proportion of rural areas tend to have much lower exposure to COVID-19 while controlling the unemployment. However, it is important to bear in mind previous experience that shows that most pandemics have significantly reduced global economic output and increased unemployment (Tisdell, 2020). Hence, perceptions and fears about the situation in the country seem justified, while the authorities, when introducing restrictions during a pandemic, have to make compromises balancing job losses with economic activity. It should also be noted that in rural population surveys, respondents' sense of place identity, i.e., awareness of belonging to a rural community, has an emotional and valuing significance. Belanche, Casaló and Rubio (2021) support in their study that rural residents show higher levels of affective and valuing place identity than urban residents. On the basis of the conducted analyses, it can be observed that in the situation of a threat — the actual existence of an epidemic and its numerous negative effects — the evaluations of respondents in the rural areas still resound with the tribal instinct and a polarisation of views takes place. This is reflected in positive self-perceptions of households and, at the same time, negative perceptions of the situation of other households in the country. Subjectivity in assessments is related to the context of the assessment, i.e., the different experiences of the respondents. This is influenced by their previous experience of pandemics and the existing situation in the country. It is important to note that respondents' assessments are changing under the influence of the increasing threat of an epidemic and the associated restrictions and freezing of the economy (stages I and IV). Stronger perceptions both about the possibility of deterioration of their own and the country's situation were observed at the beginning of the pandemic and a year after its start, when successive waves of infections occurred and drastic restrictions were placed on the functioning of the economy and people's lives. To sum up the considerations, it should be emphasised that in the assessments of rural households there is a clear dichotomy of perceptions between the assessment of own household situation and the situation in Poland, which increases as the threat of the

epidemic and its effects increase, including the escalating crisis in the country. The study clearly demonstrates that rural households feel and assess their own security much better than social security in the country. The increasing importance of social security and the need to maintain it in everyday life and work affects the country's development now and in the future. The authors believe that security in the social dimension is important for understanding the trajectory of COVID-19 impact on households. Hence, the main implication of the research is that the social security profile depends on a number of factors, and the multi-stage study conducted allows the monitoring the situation of households in Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic and can be repeated in the future. Similar to Haghani et al. (2020), the authors believe that scientific analysis and understanding of the various security implications of the COVID-19 pandemic may help society to better prepare for future pandemic outbreaks and support informed decision-making in view of societal values. Furthermore, it should be added that the research results obtained are important for the government, politicians and other decision makers who are involved in the prevention and mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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