



Martina Kolářová Veverková

Charles University in Prague

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5940-1179>

“There Just Wasn’t Time for a Discussion”: Czech Employees’ Experiences with Work-Related Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Abstract: Research on work stress during the COVID-19 pandemic has primarily focused on organizational psychology perspectives, often neglecting the role of broader social structures and meanings attached to this complex social crisis. This paper aims to provide an alternative approach, building on L. I. Pearlin’s stress process theory. The study draws on 29 in-depth interviews with Czech employees, capturing complexity of pandemic experiences and their perception. Pandemic-specific mechanisms of work stress were identified, with managerial approaches and workplace power dynamics emerging as central factors. The analysis reveals three distinct types of stress experiences, named: “Stress Mediated by Sense of Purpose,” “Disempowered Strain,” and “Behind the Shield.”

Keywords: sociology of work, work stress, stress process theory, qualitative research, in-depth interviews, COVID-19, pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented disruption of working life world-wide. The condition of working people during the pandemic can be analyzed,

* The work was supported by the grant SVV 2025 – 260788 realized at the Charles University, Faculty of Arts.

among other perspectives, through the lens of work stress. While research on work stress has traditionally examined the effects of crises such as economic recessions and high unemployment (see for example Tausig, Fenwick, 2011), little attention has been paid to crises of a different nature. In this regard, the COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique natural experiment that has inspired a lot of research efforts in this area.

As will be argued below, the existing body of research presents a somewhat limited perspectives on the topic, largely overlooking workplace power dynamics. This paper aims to offer an alternative perspective, rooted in a sociological approach to work stress, namely in stress process theory (Pearlin, 1989). Drawing on qualitative research conducted among selected groups of employees in the Czech Republic, this study examines work stress as a complex personal experience. It identifies pandemic-specific mechanisms of work stress, with managerial approaches and workplace power dynamics emerging as key factors shaping different paths of the stress process.

The Czech Republic is an example of a relatively unique COVID-19 pandemic journey, initially marked by successful containment measures and widespread solidarity, followed by high infection and death rates, strong public criticism of government actions, and massive protests against anti-pandemic measures and vaccination in the later stages. Despite the general strictness of safety measures, there was little regulation of the workplace functioning (Prokop et al., 2021; Veverková, Váňová, 2022), leaving room for voluntarism of the employers and leading to paradoxical experiences for employees.

Nonetheless, in a complex social crisis, a shared understanding of the situation is often a crucial prerequisite for addressing it successfully. Hence, this study also explores the connection between experiences of work stress and different attitudes to the COVID-19 pandemic. The types of stress experience that were identified reveal that distancing from the shared understanding can be linked not only to high strain, but also to lower involvement in the situation.

Lastly, we believe that purpose of the research on work stress during the COVID-19 pandemic should not be limited to retrospective evaluation of the events. As today's societies face the risk of crises with potentially similar features to the COVID-19 pandemic (for example crises related to climate change, armed conflicts, or future public health risks), it is essential to develop knowledge capable of supporting workers' well-being and enhancing social cohesion in such circumstances.

Literature Review

The current body of literature on work stress during the COVID-19 pandemic is mainly rooted in the fields of psychology, public and occupational health, and

management studies. At the same time, the topic has been addressed from a variety of perspectives. In the following section, the most common approaches will be presented. Specifically, a substantial portion of the literature focuses on selected professional groups, such as essential healthcare workers and employees working from home). Another frequent approach examines the entire working population, aiming to identify social groups most affected by stress.

Professional Group Focused Approach

Healthcare professionals have been the focus of extensive research across various studies. Excessive workloads, removal of professionals, lack of personal protective equipment, strict containment measures, problems with resource allocation, and risk of contagion are cited as the main sources of stress for healthcare workers (Costa et al., 2022). The role of preventive measures can be ambiguous; for instance, Akbolat et al. (2022) argue that enforcement of COVID-19 containment measures by management reduces work stress and anxiety among medical staff. Similar findings have been reported for the broader working population (Asaoka et al., 2022).

Longitudinal studies reveal both deterioration and improvement in psychological health outcomes over time. Identified risk factors include being female, younger age, working as a nurse, long shifts, being on the frontlines, and fear of contagion. Conversely, a supportive environment, psychological resources, and availability of personal protective equipment are cited as protective factors (Umbetkulova et al., 2024). Similar risk factors for increased stress levels have been identified in studies from Indonesia (Aditya et al., 2022) and China (Wang et al., 2020). Other studies confirm the link between the pandemic and increased stress among healthcare workers (Abbas et al., 2022; Alan et al., 2021; Croghan et al., 2021; Micali, 2023), as well as a decline in their physical well-being and quality of life (Nehme et al., 2023). Higher stress levels and lower resilience were found among those who previously suffered from chronic stress (Conti et al., 2022). Additionally, stress and emotional exhaustion have been associated with turnover intention (Shah et al., 2022).

Remote workers have also been the subject of extensive research. Work stress emerges as one of the primary effects of working from home during the pandemic (Dávila Morán, 2023). Key challenges for remote workers include time management and difficulties in communication and collaboration with co-workers (Hayes et al., 2021, p. 9). Many of these challenges, which lead to a decline in the well-being and productivity of remote workers, have been linked to a lack of organizational support (Costin et al., 2023, similarly Van Zoonen et al., 2021).

Similarly to healthcare workers, stress levels can also increase or decrease over time among those who work from home. In their case, work demands and ability to detach from work were identified as decisive, but the role of resources (stress

reducing factors) was not conclusively established (Knight et al., 2023). Another study revealed recovery behaviors, such as psychological detachment, mastery experiences, or control over non-work time, as significantly contributing to reducing stress levels over time (Michel et al., 2021). Attempting to capture the complexity of stressors related to lockdowns and remote work during the pandemic, some studies have examined the effects of a wide range of factors, from those related to work itself to household distractions and changes in lifestyle and routines (Kumar et al., 2021; Srivastava et al., 2022). A qualitative study found that the main stressors reported by digital workers themselves were concerns about COVID-19 infection, mental and physical exhaustion, and financial insecurity (Rahmat et al., 2022). Nonetheless, working from home led not only to stress, but also to an increase in creativity and resilience, driven by the employees themselves (Jaiswal et al., 2022; Jaiswal, Arun, 2024).

A systematic review of studies on work stress during the COVID-19 pandemic also reveals this thematic distribution, finding that healthcare workers are the most researched professional group, followed by remote workers. Other studied groups include teachers, agricultural workers, and restaurant employees (Dávila Morán et al., 2023), as well as low-wage essential workers (Loustaunau et al., 2021; Mayer et al., 2022).

Entire Working Population Approach

Recognizing that work-related stress during the pandemic is not limited to specific professional groups, other papers address the working population at large. Some studies identify multiple sources of COVID-19 related stress, such as demographic variables (gender, marital and parental status), general well-being, and work-related variables (Jimenez et al., 2023, similarly Kumar et al., 2021; Montazer et al., 2025).

Other studies have focused on developing stress models for the working population, primarily considering stressors related to the spread of the virus and the disease (Manojkrishnan, Aravind, 2020; Prasiwi, Ardi, 2021; Raja et al., 2023). Working in a public-facing job (implying greater risk of exposure to the virus) has been identified as a factor exacerbating stress, alongside various personal characteristics of the workers (Robillard et al., 2020), making retail employees prone to increased stress levels, specifically due to customer misbehavior (Mayer et al., 2022).

Another significant perspective in population-wide studies is stress induced by work–life conflict. Research confirms higher levels of stress among women workers and workers who are parents, making mothers the most affected group (Backhaus et al., 2023). Similarly, insufficient work–life balance, being a woman, and marital tensions have been identified as risk factors for reduced work performance during lockdowns. This relationship is moderated by stress induced by depletion of resources as a result of the pandemic (Parent-Lamarche, Boulet, 2021).

The distribution of pandemic-induced stress can also be linked to social inequality, as people with lower social status experienced higher levels of stress compared to those in higher-status groups (Beese et al., 2024), or to historical marginalization (Dalessandro, Lovell, 2023).

Advancing the Crisis Stress Research Agenda

Arguably, the above-mentioned perspectives, while valuable, leave room for alternative research agendas. The professional groups approach is, simply stated, based on verifying partial relations derived from the nature of the situation. The research focusing on the population at large often overlooks workplace factors and centralizes the interplay of life domains and the pandemic itself. In both cases, working conditions and the broader situational framework are treated as given. By emphasizing resilience and the maintenance of productivity, the existing research on COVID-19-related work stress tends to overlook social and workplace power structures as potential underlying sources of stress. In the following section, examples of research adopting a somewhat different approach are presented. These examples specifically highlight workplace characteristics and managerial practices as stress factors.

The COVID-19 pandemic can be understood as a fundamental re-negotiation of work-related norms, which may be the root cause of pandemic-induced work stress (Kant, Norman, 2021). Gerding et al. (2023) found that higher workload, irregular working hours (or time management difficulties in the case of remote work), and exposure to risk of COVID-19 infection were the main factors increasing work stress during the pandemic. Xie et al. (2023) emphasize the role of workplace characteristics, identifying interpersonal relationships, managerial support, job meaning, job control and work–life balance as key factors distinguishing workers with the highest and lowest stress levels during the pandemic.

Managerial practices are relatively rarely explicitly examined in studies on work stress during the pandemic. However, notable examples suggest that organizational support and perceived fairness were key factors maintaining employees' emotional well-being and psychological safety during the transition to remote work (Lee, 2021). HR strategies that seek to mitigate sources of stress and enhance employees' sense of control have been shown to alleviate stress associated with remote work (Li et al., 2023). Another study points at the importance of adjustment of HR practices and organizational preparedness for the pandemic in reducing stress by increasing employee satisfaction with working remotely (Kundu et al., 2023).

Health-promoting management practices have demonstrated a protective effect on mental health and job performance in the working population (Meunier et al.,

2022). Strategies aimed at preserving diverse aspects of employees' quality of life, including their working environment, were successful in promoting employees' well-being during the crisis (Sorribes et al., 2021). So-called "socially responsible HR management" practices were found to reduce fear among hospitality employees (He et al., 2021). In a qualitative study conducted in Nigeria, participants expressed a strong preference for compassionate leadership as a mean of alleviating work-related stress (Oruh et al., 2021).

The influence of power relations on work experiences is particularly evident in the context of low-wage essential work. The sources of stress for this group of workers primarily include contact with the public (e.g. misbehaving customers) and managerial decisions, such as failure to provide genuinely safe working conditions (Loustau et al., 2021; Mayer et al., 2022).

The literature on work stress among essential healthcare workers often – explicitly or implicitly – promotes the idea of enhancing individual resilience as a response to increased work stress. The drawback of this perspective is that it overlooks the structural and organizational conditions that not only heighten stress and anxiety but also hinder self-care strategies (Lewis et al., 2022). A study from Spain highlights supervisor and coworker support as a moderating factor for traumatic stress among healthcare workers, emphasizing the need for strategies that ensure psychological protection (Blanco-Donoso et al., 2021). As an alternative to research focused solely on individual mental health, the concept of a "community of fate" has been proposed as a framework for understanding the collective ability of frontline healthcare workers to provide care for patients in a situation of extreme distress (Montgomery et al., 2021).

Although these studies clearly demonstrate that managerial practices influence work stress in important ways, little attention has been paid to stressors rooted in the conflicting interests of employers and employees. Thus, we argue that a more in-depth understanding of workplace power dynamics during times of crisis, grounded in a sociological analysis of work stress, is necessary.

Sociological Approach to the Study of Stress

As argued above, existing research on work stress during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes certain aspects of the topic while leaving others underexplored. In the following section, a sociological approach to stress will be presented, with particular attention being paid to its differences from psychological or managerial approaches.

In sociology, the concept of stress provides an opportunity to articulate the link between social and economic structures and individual psyche. The sociological study of stress also serves as a critical alternative to psychological and medical approaches, which tend to be decontextualized and ahistorical. From a sociological perspective, hardships experienced at work are not understood as a personal issue, but rather as a logical outcome of the broader socioeconomic context (Loriol, 2014).

It is important to recognize that “stress” functions as an overarching paradigm in mental health research, encompassing various negative emotions. The main weaknesses of research within this paradigm include the above-mentioned abstraction from context, moral conservatism (where change is understood as inherently stressful and thus negative), and a lack of novel findings. Additionally, the implications of such research tend to be framed in terms of individualized and depoliticized solutions, such as the development of coping skills. Meaningful advances in the sociological study of stress can be achieved by focusing on “stressful dominations” – the exploration of how relations of power, domination, or oppression shape stress experiences and responses (Brossard, Chandler, 2022).

The most influential attempt to develop a sociological framework for the study of stress is arguably Leonard I. Pearlin’s stress process theory. This theory posits that an individual’s well-being is deeply influenced by the structural conditions in which their life is embedded. The stress process is composed of three main domains: stressors, stress mediators, and stress outcomes. Most importantly, an individual’s position within social structures determines both the stressors they encounter and the stress mediators they can access. Social structures shape individual experience through social status as well as through social roles and institutions (Pearlin, 1989; Pearlin, 1999). The stress process approach can be understood as a general framework describing the impact of social and economic realities on individual health and well-being (Pearlin, 1999).

Stressors, simply defined as circumstances that increase stress, can take the form of both single events and chronic life conditions. It is important to recognize that stressors rarely occur in isolation but rather in clusters: a primary stressor, such as an event or condition, often leads to secondary stressors, impacting various institutional roles of the individual (Pearlin, 1989). This phenomenon is referred to as stress proliferation and helps explain disparities in well-being that emerge later in life as a result of earlier life events and conditions (Pearlin, Bierman, 2013). It is therefore vital that research captures the situation comprehensively, considering all aspects of individuals’ lives (Pearlin, 1989).

Mediators are circumstances that influence the impact of stressors. Typically, coping strategies and social support are cited as mediators, but self-concept and personal values also have the ability to either mitigate or exacerbate the effects of stressors. Coping, a term for actions taken to mitigate life problems, is especially

important in the sociological perspective, as the coping mechanisms that the individuals mobilize are shaped by social group membership and social learning. Social support, consequently, should be studied through an individual's network of social relations (Pearlin, 1989). Thus, stress is not merely a response to external factors, but rather a result of the interplay between these factors and individual characteristics such as social status, values, beliefs, and resources. The meaning that the individuals attribute to life situations – how they understand and interpret events and circumstances – also moderates the resulting level of stress (Pearlin, Bierman, 2013).

Finally, stress outcomes are an overarching term for the manifestations of stress, which typically take the form of health and psychological conditions. In sociological research, it is advised to consider a range of possible outcomes (Pearlin, 1989). While anxiety, anger, and depression are commonly studied, research should not be limited to these outcomes, as stress can manifest differently across social groups (Pearlin, Bierman, 2013).

This conceptual framework is also reflected in sociological research on work stress (Tausig, Fenwick, 2011). This approach aims to address the blind spots of stress research rooted in organizational psychology, which tends to focus on job redesign or individual coping strategies while treating working conditions as fixed. Here, the focus is on explaining the broader social causes of stressful working conditions. Four macro-level forces that need to be considered are labor market processes, macroeconomic change, institutional environment, and social inequality. The assumption is that these macro-level factors impact micro-level relations between employers and employees. Individuals thus encounter socially determined stressors through their employing organization. At the same time, specific workplace conditions and demands are decided at the organizational level, which means that different employers may respond to the broader context differently. The workplace is thus a contested terrain where control over the work process is negotiated. In this approach, stress outcomes are generally framed in terms of worker health and well-being (Tausig, Fenwick, 2011).

A sociological perspective on work stress, emphasizing its collective rather than individual nature, can also be applied through social identity theory. Appraisal of stressors is influenced by the way they are understood by an individual's in-group, based on shared identity and collective norms (e.g. the normalization of certain work conditions). At the same time, a low level of identification with the employing organization is associated with higher stress levels (Haslam, Van Dick, 2011).

Methodology

In the following sections, we present the findings of qualitative research based on in-depth interviews. Although the interview design was originally prepared with principles of narrative research in mind (Andrews et al., 2008; Elliott, 2005), the character of the conducted interviews corresponds more accurately to the concept of Problem-centered Interviews (PCI) (Witzel, 2000; Witzel, Reiter, 2012). This is because of orientation of the interview on specific research questions and because participants differed in the extent to which they spontaneously developed narratives on the given subject. Thus, the strategies of active listening and dialogic character of interviewing were adopted during the initial interviews, stimulating both storytelling and elaborating on views and ideas based on the principles of PCI. The interviews include an initial free narration of the work experience during the pandemic, follow-up questions on topics mentioned in the narration, and a set of open-ended questions on various aspects of work (work demands, horizontal and vertical relationships, rewards etc.) as well as private life of the research participants and impacts of the pandemic on it.¹

The research participants were recruited with assistance of a short questionnaire, recording the participants' gender, age, education, residency, work situation during the pandemic and willingness to participate in the research. The key criterion of selection was belonging to one of the following categories: "first line" workers (employees in health care and social services),² remote workers, blue-collar workers in manufacturing or logistics, and people who lost their job due to the pandemic.³ A research agency was responsible for the recruitment from their online database. Secondly, recruitment through personal contacts and recommendations was used to enlarge the sample and ensure optimal distribution of the research sample, especially coverage of some of the work-related situations. The interviews were conducted via videocall or in person, based on preferences of the research participants. They lasted approximately one hour. The fieldwork started in September 2022 and concluded in November 2023.

In total, 29 interviews were conducted with a good distribution of the research participants in terms of the above explained sub-groups, gender, age, education and Prague/non-Prague residency.

¹ The interview guidelines included also questions on risk perception during the pandemic crisis that will serve for other research outputs.

² We do not use the usual term of "essential worker" as, based on the findings presented below, this attributed category is not necessarily reflected in the experience and understanding of the situation.

³ The selection of categories is partially inspired by professional groups identified as at-risk or in a difficult position during the pandemic by ILO (International Labour Organization, 2021).

Table 1

Structure of the research sample

Category	Number of cases in the research sample
Total	29
“First line” workers	7
Remote workers	9
Blue-collar workers	8
People who lost their job	7 ⁴
Female	15
Male	14
Younger than 45	15
Older than 45	14
Prague residents	12
Non-Prague residents	17
Secondary education without graduation exam	3
Secondary education with graduation exam or post-secondary college	16
Tertiary education	10

Source: author's own elaboration.

The transcripts of the interviews were processed in Atlas.ti. The coding strategy was based on the methodological principles of combining a deductive and inductive approach (Bingham, 2023; Deterding, Waters, 2021; Eakin, Gladstone, 2020; Fereday, Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Following Bingham's research framework (Bingham, 2023), parts of the interviews were understood through the stress paradigm (as stressors or as mediators). Individual codes were created inductively, based on the data, and subsequently gathered in granular groups with the aim to further analyze the emerging motives and identify patterns among the research participants. The coding process was accompanied by intensive memoing, which led, among other things, to identifying the presence or absence of certain rhetoric or ideas in the interviews.

⁴ The sum of cases for these categories is higher than 29, because some of the research participants belong to more sub-groups.

Pandemic-Induced Work Stress

Qualitative data analysis helped identify several mechanisms of work stress specific to the pandemic. These stressors include task-related stress, different aspects of workplace relationships, as well as hardships related to pandemic measures. In the following section, we present these mechanisms with the intention to understand the stressors in a general way, so they are potentially applicable to crises in the future.

Organizational Change

For the research participants, the pandemic properly began with changes in their own lives, working lives especially. For on-site workers, this meant adaptation of safety regulations and usage of personal protective equipment. For remote workers, the challenges consisted of changes to the organizational and technical conditions of their work. For some, there was a substantial shift in terms of job content and increase or diminution of workload.

These rapid transitions are perceived as stressful if the employees encounter pressure to quickly adapt to a new regimen without sufficient organizational support, or if the new job content is perceived negatively.

So, so it was pretty crazy at first, the school didn't and probably couldn't take us into consideration. They said: you're at home, you get the money, but you have to work in [specific software] that you have to learn yourself, we can't teach you. Yeah, and it's just unthinkable not to teach online and not to get results or just email the assignments.

Technical high-school teacher working from home, female

Difficulties of Complying with Safety Regulations

Extensive safety measures were one of the key consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. A crucial learning is that in their everyday application, they have ambiguous nature – safety measures can be functional and desired by the workers or dysfunctional and coercive depending on different contexts (Kolářová Veverková, 2024).

The physical discomfort of wearing protective equipment is a widely shared stressful circumstance. It varies from moderate unease during sedentary work to breathing difficulties of manual workers and extreme hardship of work in full protective suits for healthcare workers.

I just absolutely hated wearing a respirator when giving a bath to someone or helping with a shower in a bathroom full of steam. You can't breathe and you've still got that respirator on your mouth. It's uncomfortable, and also the respirator was on my mouth for an awful lot of hours a day, not only [when I was] with the clients but also on public transport [...].

Personal care assistant, female

Numerous and often changing regulations pose additional hardships. In the daily reality of work, there are many situations in which measures such as physical distancing are difficult or impossible to uphold. These circumstances are especially stressful if the organization insists on formal compliance with the rules without considering the actual situations that the employees encounter (for comparison Aloisi, De Stefano, 2022), or if the requirements are not consistent for all the departments of the organization:

In the canteen, there were some spots where we could sit and they took away the chairs so that we couldn't sit down together. It was actually comical, we felt just like in a kindergarten: "don't talk to each other!" [...] They [security service] were standing there and they were supervising us. Not all of them were much into it, yeah, some of them were more easy-going and some of them were "too conscientious."

Manual worker in manufacturing, male

The Burden Related to Work Tasks

In many ways, the pandemic leads to modification of work requirements or to an increase in the burden connected to performing work tasks. In some cases, there is a significant reduction of workload, often foreshadowing job loss. In other cases, there are several mechanisms of increase of workload in relation to the pandemic. These include cases when the firm accepts pandemic-related business contracts, illnesses and absences of other employees, and direct involvement of the workers in "combating the pandemic." The latter does not concern only healthcare workers, but also for example employees performing the testing for COVID-19 in the organization. For some of them, it is even appropriate to talk about extreme work (the extensification and intensification of work to an exceptional level) (for comparison Cai et al., 2021).

Well, at some moments, I just didn't know how to get the work done quickly, yeah, there were a lot of demands from the clients, so I was more stressed to get it done. I needed to sort it out correctly [...], so that it wouldn't be like something

got connected incorrectly, or that there would be some mistake in pricing, tariff and so on. Because it means [my colleagues] would have to go back to it, so I was worried about that. Well, but it was always more or less done somehow. Yeah, like it worked out well in the end.

Internet connection solutions salesperson, female

In addition, unpredictability or uncertainty at work emerges as a feature of the pandemic. This is due to rapidly changing regulations, unpredictable quarantines and absences of other workers. In practice, this leads to disruption of work processes and internal worker transfers between departments or work tasks. Some of the research participants described a crisis mode of operation, in which standard functioning of the organization was left behind in order to handle the situation.

I was wondering during the evenings whether my colleague would come, whether I would be there with someone else, or whether I would be there alone. [...] But so if he doesn't come I'll go somewhere else, they'll put me in another department or I'll be there with somebody else.

Manual worker in wood processing, male

Interpersonal Contacts as Stressor

The pandemic also altered the way people in various roles interact with each other. The situation could cause conflicts among the colleagues – research participants were mentioning unlikable behavior of others due to their stress and nervousity and conflicts regarding handling of new situations at work and fulfillment of containment measures (especially discrepancies in conditions provided to different employees or departments). Another source of conflict were dissimilar opinions on the pandemic and the way it was addressed.

...And the people at our job started getting really mad at [colleague who traveled abroad], like she doesn't give a damn that the safety measures are this and that and she just does what she wants. And now she's gonna make us sick here. It was never possible to prove if anybody caught anything from that colleague or not or if she caught anything at all. [...] Well, but the relations were already kind of strained.

Airport Duty Free Shop manager, laid-off during the pandemic, male

Secondly, employees also faced difficult situations in contact with people in position of their clients, customers etc., for healthcare providers, this was mainly in contact with families of the patients. These situations were mainly due to unwillingness

to comply with the containment measures or due to nervousity and hardships that they experienced:

There was a problem that people were worried about their relatives, they saw them at home, [...] then they were taken by ambulance to the hospital. And now what? They didn't get any news about their relatives. [...] We were answering the phone during the three hours when we were resting. If you picked up the phone ten times for one and the same person and it was relative no. 1 calling, relative no. 2, relative no. 3, and so on, you didn't even have time to rest...

Nurse at a COVID-19 ICU I, female

Typology of Pandemic Stress Experiences

In the following section, we introduce three distinctive types of stress experiences that emerged from the data analysis. We consider these types as examples of different stress processes. Research participants that represent the respective type of experience share a similar distribution of stressors and mediators. The main stress outcome in this study is the overall tone and emotion present in the narration of the communication partner and, secondarily, their attitude to the pandemic itself. Also, we refrain from linking the following types of stress experiences to demographic characteristics or target subgroups, as all of them are represented by heterogeneous group of research participants, and the sample size does not allow a statistical analysis.

Two main characteristics distinguish the types of stress experience. Firstly, it is the overall degree of stressors described within the account of the research participant. The second one is perception of the actions of the management, i.e., way of experiencing power relations at work. "Stress Mediated by Sense of Purpose" is characterized by experiencing various stressors, but perceiving the management as supportive, whereas "Disempowered Strain," while also concerns experiencing numerous stressors, evaluate management's actions negatively. Lastly, "Behind the Shield" is characterized by lower level of stress and rather indifferent relation to work-related authorities.

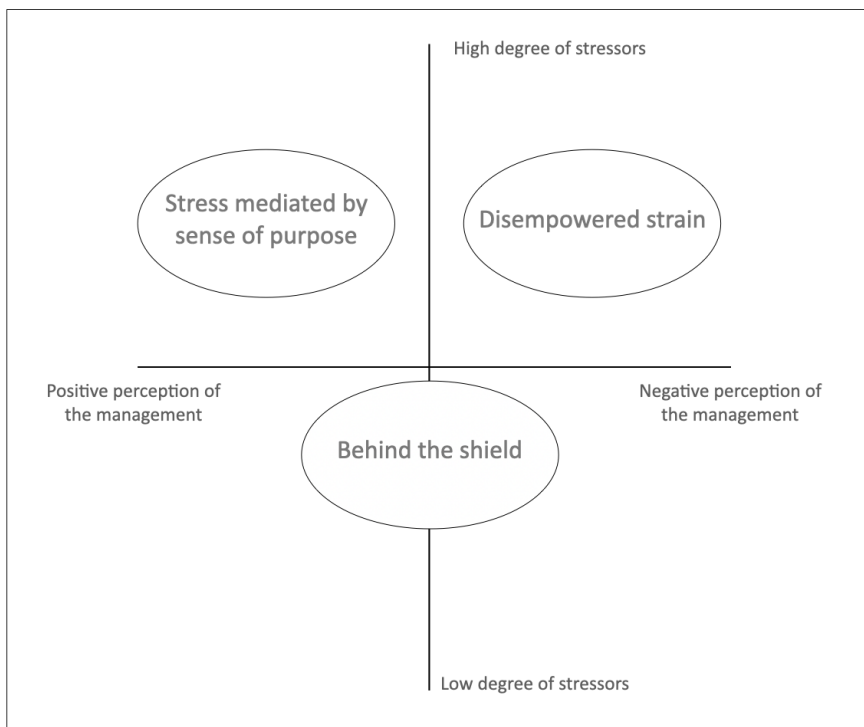


Fig. 1. Typology of the Stress Experiences

Type 1 – Stress Mediated by Sense of Purpose

So we were really opening at 4:30 a.m., which for me means getting up at 3:00 a.m., and that was just horrible. But we all held on. We kind of really bonded around that, even though the testers were collapsing with fatigue, literally. [...] I guess [my motivation] was the situation, not specifically those people, well of course they needed to go to work and they needed to take the test or they couldn't go to work, but the whole situation. Like probably not to save the world from COVID-19 altogether, but to do something in the pandemic. Something. It felt that way to me.

Testing coordinator at a power plant, lost previous job due to the pandemic, female

The first type of experience is distinctive by enduring a range of the above explained pandemic-induced stressors, but also by discovering various mediators. Overall, the pandemic is shown as an adversity or even a challenge that needs to be well-managed and one must rise to the occasion. The emphasis is put on the needs of other people rather than on one's own. The research participants who represent

this type of experience are not limited to the group of workers in health or social care. Other examples in the study include a postal carrier, a clerk in public administration or a former tourist guide. This illustrates the extent to which the stress experience is shaped by the meanings attributed to the situation.

Social support was a factor contributing to alleviating stress, specifically a good work team and support among colleagues, defined by trust, consideration and mutual help in performing work tasks:

In our organization, there were very few conflicts and when they did occur, I don't think that they went beyond normal bounds, rather the opposite, as there was a lot of support both from the management and among the colleagues. So it worked perfectly well there, at least in that respect.

Social worker in NGO legal counselling, male

Part of this experience is also understanding one's job as "work for others." Research participants emphasized the meaning which their work has for their clients, patients etc., rather than their duty to the employer or a financial reward as a motivation. A similar notion of responsibility is expressed regarding their family members, indicating that this attitude is a key feature of the "Stress Mediated by Sense of Purpose" experience. An underlying motive in the narration is a sense of agency, specifically in the explicit or implicit definition of one's role, or purpose, in the pandemic on a societal, vocational, or personal level.

So we also tried to cheer-up those people [receiving postal items]. When we were bringing the packages, the paid ones, we said "just leave the money somewhere for us, we'll gather it," right. And then the smile [that was an important thing we did], because those people who had the COVID-19 looked terrible. [...] You were like, you wanted to cheer those people up, just like say: "look, well it's going to get better, you're going to be better tomorrow, aren't you?" It's more like a little cheer-up.

Postal carrier, female

... responsibility, especially towards my wife, she also belongs to the at-risk groups, so I was thinking... Even if I wanted to do more [and get more involved in tackling the pandemic], I couldn't because I thought I didn't want to bear an unnecessary risk.

Social worker in NGO legal counselling, male

As was discussed in the previous sections of this paper, the workplace is an area where means of power and control are negotiated. This can also help to differentiate types of stress experience. In this case, managerial power is perceived as legitimate and is not contested. The research participants described the workplace power

relations in neutral terms, as an authority to be respected, or even in positive terms, as a source of support:

Well, if there were new regulations, I don't know, whatever they were, in the COVID-19 testing, sending the samples to one lab then to another and so on, that kept changing all the time, I think the awareness [and information provided by the hospital management] was good enough. [There was an effort] to make it easier for us as nurses, in terms of documentation or taking care of patients, that was made simpler for us too, we didn't really have to do things that maybe we do now.

Nurse at a COVID-19 ICU I, female

Lastly, this type of stress experience is connected to a shared understanding of the pandemic itself. The research participants understood the pandemic as a risky social situation, accepted that the safety measures were put in practice and respected them (in other words, the measures were taken as legitimate). This attitude was usually not directly expressed but is rather present as an underlying motive in their narration. In some cases, this attitude was also expressed as active support for the safety measures:

I guess we all felt very intensely that it was upsetting us and hurting us when people were irresponsible, people who weren't affected by [the pandemic] [...] Damn, it's just so reckless to behave like that to potentially prolong the [uncontrolled spread of the virus] [...] We were thinking, like why the hell are these people so irresponsible, it's selfish of them not only towards the people who may get infected and die but also towards us, who have to be in [the COVID-19 ICU] for longer.

Doctor at a COVID-19 ICU, female

Type 2 – Disempowered Strain

We had a strictly defined work regimen and the boss was contacting us by phone, then he even watched us via web camera to check if we were all really there, when we had a meeting. [...] Well, we were used to it. He was also controlling at work, and of course at the beginning it was unpleasant. Once, when we had a meeting, my mobile phone just wouldn't work, it wouldn't turn on, and then he just emailed me: "hey, are you home, are you available"? So I wrote him back: "Yes, I am, but unfortunately my phone is just acting up and I just can't get in touch with you." Like, he thought we were cheating on him a little bit, well, he was checking up on us a lot.

Accountant working from home, female

[New measures were introduced] in the form of an order, there was no time for any discussion with the employees whether they liked it or not. [...] They were sending out text messages to [all the workers] about what is going to happen, when and how, but there just wasn't time for a discussion.

Employee of a manufacturing company, partially working from home, male

The second type of stress experience is, similarly to the previous one, defined by enduring the above listed pandemic-induced stressors, but also by lack of mediators that would alleviate stress. The overall emotion is negative and described as hardship. The research participants expressed perceived injustice and emphasized the way they were personally negatively affected by the pandemic (as opposed to the previous type of experience, where the emphasis was put on the others):

So, it has definitely taken at least a year off my life, right? It just drained you quite a bit mentally and physically and it was counterproductive because you were stressed out, tired, exhausted...

Technical high-school teacher working from home, female

A sense of purpose is not present in the narration, even though representatives of this experience include workers who belong to the essential category (Nurse at a COVID-19 ICU or food warehouse worker). We argue that the perceived oppressiveness of the management practices hindered finding one's meaningful role in the pandemic.

A key feature of this type of stress experience is a negative perception of management practices, or more broadly of power relations at work, to the point where the management is no longer understood as a legitimate authority. There are several angles of this critique:

First, that the management took the wrong approach to the pandemic measures, did not communicate with the employees to a sufficient extent, or there were shortcomings in the distribution of work.

There were a lot of things that were absolutely illogical and from my point of view completely non-functional. I'll give an example: at the beginning, respirators or masks were issued on the basis of the return of the used ones. I think it was highly unhygienic and there was basically a bin [for the used masks], unprotected, into which anyone could put their hand at any time. [It was not suitable for] manipulation with contaminated material, which is to say, this was certainly not thought out and I think it put people in much more danger than if they did not have the respirators at all.

Manual worker in manufacturing, male

Second, the research participants identified injustice in the relationship of the employees and the management. This injustice consisted in either the fact that the decision-making was in the hands of those who did not carry out the key tasks in the organization (for example, computer work as opposed to actual work in the warehouse), or if the management was using coercive or humiliating practices:

Well, we [a team of nurses from one department,] went [to COVID-19 ICU] together, and we were told by the management that if any of us realized [...] that we just couldn't handle being there, then there was no problem going back to our workplace. [...] But the reality was completely different, they just wouldn't let anyone out. Myself, when I actually got sick afterwards with COVID-19 and I collapsed, they just wouldn't let me go.

Nurse at a COVID-19 ICU II, female

The third point of critique concerned situations when the research participants felt like the management made the pandemic more difficult than it would need to be by ignoring the needs of employees, prioritizing economic interests of the organization over employees' interests, demanding high performance, or imposing nonsensical requirements:

We didn't know [the new software], we were working in a [...] different system previously, and then suddenly they "threw" something completely new at us. [The management wanted us] to immediately perform at 100 %, [...] so it's been stressful.

Accountant working from home, female

Research participants with the "Disempowered Strain" experience differ in their interpretation of the pandemic. Some of them share the attitude that was described above in the "Stress Mediated by Sense of Purpose" experience. But we can also identify another way of thinking about the pandemic, questioning the shared understanding. Some level of confusion is present, as the research participants oscillate between taking and not taking the risks of COVID-19 seriously, or offer alternative explanations of the pandemic. In their interpretation, the situation is ambiguous, but the measures that are taken are very strict and have negative impacts on people's lives. As a result, these research participants tend to have a negative opinion on the way the pandemic risks are addressed.

It was not obligatory to wear respirators in public transport and still, we had to wear them at work. In public transport, I dare say, the contact is the same as maybe worse because you're crammed on top of each other, [the risk] is maybe even higher than at work [...] I was on the night shift, I was alone, yeah I had 300 square

meters to myself [and still had to wear a respirator]. [...] So I think that those opinions changed a lot [during the course of the pandemic] and even the people who maybe were convinced that some of those measures were like okay, that they were functional, I think then they reconsidered. [...] So, when I sort of figured it out, it started to become apparent that the virus wasn't nearly as dangerous, as it was basically a kind of flu to put it in layman's terms. So some of the stress went away.

Manual worker in manufacturing, male

Type 3 – Behind the Shield

During the pandemic, it was the restrictions and masks that bothered me. That's what bothered me. But like, we endured it because we had to, it just couldn't be done any other way. I obeyed, but it bothered me. Compared to the normal situation, there were actually no vacations. Normally, there is more to enjoy in personal life.

Nurse in an enclosed psychiatric ward, male

The third type of pandemic stress experience is defined by experiencing fewer stressors, without a clear pattern. This is due to specific life and work circumstances of the research participants, thanks to which they, in their own perception, did not encounter the main hardships related to the pandemic. For example, these are cases of workplaces with a low concentration or circulation of people, or cases of job loss while being in a secure financial position. Consequently, compared to the previous two types of experience, a more neutral emotion was present in the narration, accompanied by a sense of safety (thanks to perceived job or financial security):

I simply lost my job at that moment, but I didn't take it dramatically or regretfully

Tourist guide, occasionally working in transportation and delivery during the pandemic, male

Inconveniences and annoyances are, even if to a lesser extent, part of this experience, as well as occasional criticism of authorities:

Those bosses who manage the company, despite the fact that they receive the reports and that they see [the work performance] there, suddenly found out that by not having [employees] in the room, they can't "see" them at all... So they started to invent and introduce other methods of reporting, control, and monitoring. [...] So yeah, sometimes, especially at the end of the month, it was a hassle to fill in all the spreadsheets correctly and stuff and make sure that all the spreadsheets fit together...

Head of IT department in a financial institution, working from home, male

The research participants who reported this type of experience express a distance from the pandemic; it is not experienced as something crucial (for themselves or even in general). They emphasize its society-wide character and a lack of their own agency in it. Similarly to the “Disempowered Strain” type of experience, a sense of their own purpose in the pandemic situation is not present in the narration:

I just felt sorry for all those people, a lot of people died because of the COVID-19 and it could have been avoided. [...] Or the misinformation, the anti-vaxxers [...] it had such an impact on the whole society.

Brand promoter at retail store, furloughed during the pandemic, male

Well, at work, I don't think much has changed. Except, I don't know, the masks. There's two of us at the hall, so there wasn't, like, any risk.... And there was no change at work otherwise. [Researcher: What did you think about the spread of the virus here in Czechia?] Well, I thought it was nothing, well. So I took it lightly. And I also thought it probably wasn't that bad.

Manual worker in wood processing, male

While dissimilar, these two excerpts both showcase the sense of externality of the pandemic to the research participants. They also represent different attitudes to the pandemic itself, as part of the research participants uphold the shared understanding of the pandemic described above (risky situation, legitimate measures), while others question its seriousness and meaningfulness of the safety measures. Aside from differences in assessing the urgency of the situation, the research participants emphasized that the measures created obstacles for their private life (social and leisure activities), which resulted in perceiving them as bothersome and exaggerated:

I was afraid that maybe they wouldn't let us travel or go anywhere, or I wouldn't be able to go on holiday, [nowhere but] to the garden. Or maybe, we would be allowed to, but the restrictions and the conditions would be so [demanding] that I wouldn't want to meet them. They'd just be unacceptable to me, that's what I was afraid of.

Head of IT department at a financial institution, working from home, male

Discussion and Conclusions

In the initial sections of this paper, we presented an overview of the current state of research of the work-related stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This

diverse body of research offers valuable, but partial perspectives on the subject. Namely, the studies tend to overlook specific workplace characteristics and disregard less apparent root causes of stress. The aim of this paper was to provide an alternative perspective of holistic subjective experience, understood through the lenses of a stress process. Rather than focusing on one selected professional group, we attempted to find patterns of sources of stress, mediators and sense-making on a relatively heterogeneous sample of workers. As the nature of our findings goes beyond narrowly defined characteristics of the COVID-19 pandemic (phenomena like wearing personal protective equipment or fear of contagion), we believe that they have a potential to be relevant and applicable in other societal crises.

Pandemic-induced stressors fall into four broader categories – organizational change, difficulties of complying with the safety measures, burden related to work tasks and interpersonal contact. The identified mechanisms are largely consistent with the existing research, but we believe that more attention should be paid to demands related to safety measures, as they add to the stress level both directly (discomfort, effort of fulfilling them) and indirectly (conflict over the way in which they are fulfilled). Based on the presented body of literature, this specific subject is little present in research under the stress paradigm.

A separate and crucial source of stress, relevant for the “Disempowered Strain” experience, is the managerial approach, in other words, consequences of power relations at work. We demonstrated how the oppressive nature of these relations shapes the workers’ overall experience as negative and gives rise to anger, which may even result in turning against the shared understanding of the crisis. As one of the representatives of this type of experience put it: “there just wasn’t time for a discussion.” This quotation illustrates an understanding of the inherently undemocratic nature of vertical work relationships, which is, in general, valid also for other types of stress experiences. The difference is that in this case, the managements’ actions are perceived critically.

On the other hand, the “Stress Mediated by Sense of Purpose” experience, characterized by a neutral or even positive perception of power relations at work, demonstrates the strength of mediators under highly demanding conditions. Social support, specifically relations of solidarity in the work team, and meaning attributed to one’s work, precisely finding a purpose or role in the situation, are the predominant mediators of stress. This type of experience is similar to what Montgomery et al. (2021) identify as communities of fate among the healthcare workers, yet we are demonstrating that this way of experiencing the pandemic situation is not limited to a specific professional group.

The “Behind the Shield” experience represents a quasi-ideal scenario of lower-level exposure to stressors and consequences of the crisis, leaving a more or less neutral impression. The potential negative side of this type of experience lies in

the mental distance from the critical situation, which can be, in some cases, translated in lack of willingness to participate in common efforts to resolve it.

The application of the stress process theory on employees' experience during the COVID-19 pandemic provides a meaningful framework for understanding mechanisms of work stress in this context. We can observe how different elements of the stress process interact, specifically, how experiencing hostile management practices hinders the development of stress mediators. On the other hand, mobilizing of social support and definition of one's role in the crisis, which can be understood as coping strategy, create an empowering experience.

Regarding the application of the theory on work stress (Tausig, Fenwick, 2011), we can affirm the importance of focus on organizational level and its interaction with macro-level realities. As we could have observed in the literature review, this focus is not strongly present in the stress research of the pandemic, but it was revealed as crucial for understanding the employee experience in our findings. Nevertheless, the macro-level forces that are proposed by Tausig and Fenwick (2011) (labor market processes, macroeconomic change, institutional environment, and social inequality) emphasize the economic aspects of social reality – we propose that in the current context, a fifth element is added to consideration. It would be the society being at risk of threats that are primarily of non-economic nature, like the pandemics, but also situations related to climate change, armed conflicts, etc. As these phenomena grow in relevance in today's societies, this enlargement of the theory could be a ground for further research on specific mechanisms that come to act in situations of this nature.

As a last point related to theory, we would like to discuss understanding of opinions and attitudes as a stress outcome. This aspect is usually either not included in stress research, or, in the case of stress process theory, values and beliefs, which form the basis for interpretation of experienced circumstances, are considered a stress mediators (Pearlin, Bierman, 2013). Yet in our analysis, sense-making in a critical situation (the attitude to COVID-19 pandemic) as a stress outcome provided one of the key tools to understand the stress experience. This is relevant not only for the "Stress Mediated by Sense of Purpose" and "Disempowered Strain" types of experience, but especially for the "Behind the Shield" experience, where it reveals an unexpected potential downside of otherwise positive scenario. We believe that including relevant attitudes among the wider range of stress outcomes can serve as a strong analytical tool, opening new ways of understanding the political dimension of stress, and, in context of a crisis, contributing to the development of strategies to address the situation successfully.

As was argued in the theoretical part of this paper, the stress research typically suggests job redesigning or strategies to increase employees' resilience as tools to alleviate stress. Similarly to Lewis et al. (2022), our findings demonstrate the way relationships of power hinder the mitigation of stress. Because of the conflictual

nature of these relations, the above-mentioned strategies are at risk to have a limited impact. Thus, especially in times of a crisis, it may not be adequate to pursue “business as usual.” We suggest that principles of workplace democracy should be supported and included in the repertoire of recommendations – with the aim to alleviate stress as well as to successfully tackle the crises.

Limitations of This Study

The data for this study, in-depth interviews, were collected with the goal to capture a holistic, retrospective account of subjective experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of work, personal life, and interpretation of the situation. This research design may produce different findings than, for example, interviews collected in initial or peak stages of a crisis. However, we do not find any notable contradictions between our study and other qualitative research on the subject matter.

Furthermore, our sample includes a limited number of research participants who experienced selected types of job-related situations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data was collected in the Czech Republic and is therefore situated in specific political and social context. The effort was made to identify conceptual patterns, rather than apparent similarities, to formulate findings with broader validity. Nevertheless, future research is encouraged to explore the extent to which our findings are applicable to different contexts.

Bibliography

- Abbas S., AL-Abrow H., Abdullah H.O., Alnoor A., Khattak Z.Z., Khaw K.W., 2022: *Encountering COVID-19 and Perceived Stress and the Role of a Health Climate among Medical Workers*. “Current Psychology,” vol. 41(12), pp. 9109–9122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01381-8>.
- Aditya M.R., Mansyur M., Mokoagow M.I., Adi N.P., Fitriani D.Y., Tobing H., Pujo J.M., Kallel H., 2022: *Stress among Healthcare Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Determinant Factors: A Cross-Sectional Study*. “Medical Journal of Indonesia,” vol. 31(3), pp. 148–154. <https://doi.org/10.13181/mji.oa.226030>.
- Akbolat M., Durmuş A., Ünal Ö., Ezen M., 2022: *The Influences of Corporate Policies for COVID-19 on Work Stress and Anxiety among Healthcare Employees*. “Work,” vol. 73(4), pp. 1125–1133. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-205197>.

- Alan H., Eskin Bacaksiz F., Tiryaki Sen H., Taskiran Eskici G., Gumus E., Harmanci Seren A.K., 2021: *"I'm a Hero, but...": An Evaluation of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Levels of Frontline Healthcare Professionals during COVID-19 Pandemic in Turkey*. "Perspectives in Psychiatric Care," vol. 57(3), pp. 1126–1136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12666>.
- Aloisi A., De Stefano V., 2022: *Essential Jobs, Remote Work and Digital Surveillance: Addressing the COVID-19 Pandemic Panopticon*. "International Labour Review," vol. 161(2), pp. 289–314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12219>.
- Andrews M., Squire C., Tamboukou M., 2008: *Doing Narrative Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Asaoka H., Sasaki N., Imamura K., Kuroda R., Tsuno K., Kawakami N., 2022: *Effects of Workplace Measures against COVID-19 on Psychological Distress of Full-Time Employees: A 12-Month Prospective Study in the COVID-19 Pandemic*. "Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health," vol. 48(6), pp. 468–478. <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.4031>.
- Backhaus I., Hoven H., Bambra C., Oksanen T., Rigó M., Di Tecco C., Iavicoli S., Dragano N., 2023: *Changes in Work-Related Stressors before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Differences by Gender and Parental Status*. "International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health," vol. 96(3), pp. 421–431. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-022-01932-8>.
- Beese F., Wachtler B., Grabka M.M., Blume M., Kersjes C., Gutu R., Mauz E., Hoebel J., 2024: *Socioeconomic Inequalities in Pandemic-Induced Psychosocial Stress in Different Life Domains among the Working-Age Population*. "BMC Public Health," vol. 24(1), article 1421. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-18851-7>.
- Bingham A.J., 2023: *From Data Management to Actionable Findings: A Five-Phase Process of Qualitative Data Analysis*. "International Journal of Qualitative Methods," vol. 22, pp. 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231183620>.
- Blanco-Donoso L.M., Moreno-Jiménez J., Amutio A., Gallego-Alberto L., Moreno-Jiménez B., Garrosa E., 2021: *Stressors, Job Resources, Fear of Contagion, and Secondary Traumatic Stress among Nursing Home Workers in Face of the COVID-19: The Case of Spain*. "Journal of Applied Gerontology," vol. 40(3), pp. 244–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0733464820964153>.
- Brossard B., Chandler A., 2022: *Society as Stressor*. In: *Explaining Mental Illness: Sociological Perspectives*. Bristol: Bristol University Press, pp. 34–63.
- Cai M., Tindal S., Tartanoglu Bennett S., Velu J., 2021: *'It's Like a War Zone': Jay's Liminal Experience of Normal and Extreme Work in a UK Supermarket during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. "Work, Employment and Society," vol. 35(2), pp. 386–395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017020977067>.
- Conti A., Russotto S., Opizzi A., Ratti M., Nicolini D., Vanhaecht K., Panella M., 2022: *Work-Related Stress among a Cohort of Italian Long-Term Care Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Observational Study*. "International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health," vol. 19(10), article 5874. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19105874>.

- Costa N.N.G., Servo M.L.S., Figueredo W.N., 2022: *COVID-19 and the Occupational Stress Experienced by Health Professionals in the Hospital Context: Integrative Review*. "Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem," vol. 75(1), article e20200859. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2020-0859>.
- Costin A., Roman A.F., Balica R.-S., 2023: *Remote Work Burnout, Professional Job Stress, and Employee Emotional Exhaustion during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. "Frontiers in Psychology," vol. 14, article 1193854. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1193854>.
- Croghan I.T., Chesak S.S., Adusumalli J., Fischer K.M., Beck E.W., Patel S.R., Ghosh K., Schroeder D.R., Bhagra A., 2021: *Stress, Resilience, and Coping of Healthcare Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. "Journal of Primary Care & Community Health," vol. 12, pp. 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21501327211008448>.
- Dalessandro C., Lovell A., 2023: *Race, Marginalization, and Perceptions of Stress among Workers Worldwide Post-2020*. "Sociological Inquiry," vol. 93(3), pp. 571–591. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12531>.
- Dávila Morán R.C., 2023: *Influence of Remote Work on the Work Stress of Workers in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review*. "Sustainability," vol. 15, article 12489. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151612489>.
- Dávila Morán R.C., Sánchez Soto J.M., López Gómez H.E., Espinoza Camus F.C., Palomino Quispe J.F., Castro Llaja L., Díaz Tavera Z.R., Ramirez Wong F.M., 2023: *Work Stress as a Consequence of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review*. "Sustainability," vol. 15, article 4701. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15064701>.
- Deterding N.M., Waters M.C., 2021: *Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-First-Century Approach*. "Sociological Methods & Research," vol. 50(2), pp. 708–739. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124118799377>.
- Eakin J.M., Gladstone B., 2020: *"Value-Adding" Analysis: Doing More With Qualitative Data*. "International Journal of Qualitative Methods," vol. 19, pp. 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920949333>.
- Elliott J., 2005: *Using Narrative in Social Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Fereday J., Muir-Cochrane E., 2006: *Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development*. "International Journal of Qualitative Methods," vol. 5(1), pp. 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107>.
- Gerding T., Davis K.G., Wang J., 2023: *An Investigation into Occupational Related Stress of At-Risk Workers during COVID-19*. "Annals of Work Exposures and Health," vol. 67(1), pp. 118–128. <https://doi.org/10.1093/annweh/wxac061>.
- Haslam S.A., Van Dick R., 2011: *A Social Identity Approach to Workplace Stress*. In: *Social Psychology and Organizations*. Eds. D. De Cremer, R. Van Dick, J.K. Murnighan. New York: Routledge, pp. 325–346.
- Hayes S.W., Priestley J.L., Moore B.A., Ray H.E., 2021: *Perceived Stress, Work-Related Burnout, and Working from Home before and during COVID-19: An*

- Examination of Workers in the United States*. "SAGE Open," vol. 11(4), pp. 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211058193>.
- He J., Mao Y., Morrison A.M., Coca-Stefaniak J.A., 2021: *On Being Warm and Friendly: The Effect of Socially Responsible Human Resource Management on Employee Fears of the Threats of COVID-19*. "International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management," vol. 33(1), pp. 346–366. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-04-2020-0300>.
- International Labour Organization, 2021: *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021*. Geneva: ILO. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_795453.pdf [accessed: 03.01.2022].
- Jaiswal A., Arun C.J., 2024: *Working from Home during COVID-19 and Its Impact on Indian Employees' Stress and Creativity*. "Asian Business & Management," vol. 23, pp. 312–336. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-021-00174-8>.
- Jaiswal A., Gupta S., Prasanna S., 2022: *Theorizing Employee Stress, Well-Being, Resilience and Boundary Management in the Context of Forced Work from Home during COVID-19*. "South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases," vol. 11(2), pp. 86–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/22779779221103586>.
- Jimenez W.P., Katz I.M., Liguori E.A., 2023: *Fear and Trembling While Working in a Pandemic: An Exploratory Meta-Analysis of Workers' COVID-19 Distress*. "Occupational Health Science," vol. 7(1), pp. 39–69. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41542-022-00135-0>.
- Kant L., Norman E., 2021: *Working Under the Gun: A Theoretical Analysis of Stressors Associated With the Re-Negotiation of Norms and Control of Work Tasks during COVID-19*. "Frontiers in Psychology," vol. 12, article 577769. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.577769>.
- Knight C., Keller A.C., Parker S.K., 2023: *Job Demands, Not Resources, Predict Worsening Psychological Distress during the Early Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. "Work & Stress," vol. 37(1), pp. 55–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2021.1938238>.
- Kolářová Veverková M., 2024: *Prekarita práce v období pandemie Covid-19 v perspektivě struktury a subjektivity*. "Sociální studia / Social Studies," vol. 21(2), pp. 65–86. <https://doi.org/10.5817/SOC2024-2-65>.
- Kumar P., Kumar N., Aggarwal P., Yeap J.A.L., 2021: *Working in Lockdown: The Relationship between COVID-19-Induced Work Stressors, Job Performance, Distress, and Life Satisfaction*. "Current Psychology," vol. 40(12), pp. 6308–6323. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01567-0>.
- Kundu S.C., Chahar P., Tuteja P., 2023: *COVID-Adjusted HR Practices and Employees' Stress across Continents: Testing a Moderated Mediation Model*. "South Asian Journal of Business Studies," vol. 13(3), pp. 442–462. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SAJBS-10-2022-0366>.
- Lee H., 2021: *Changes in Workplace Practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Roles of Emotion, Psychological Safety and Organisation Support*. "Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance," vol. 8(1), pp. 97–128. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-06-2020-0104>.

- Lewis S., Willis K., Bismark M., Smallwood N., 2022: *A Time for Self-Care? Frontline Health Workers' Strategies for Managing Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. "SSM – Mental Health," vol. 2, article 100053. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmmh.2022.100053>.
- Li G., Zheng Q., Xia M., 2023: *How Do Human Resource Practices Help Employees Alleviate Stress in Enforced Remote Work during Lockdown?* "International Journal of Manpower," vol. 44(2), pp. 354–369. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-08-2021-0486>.
- Loriol M., 2014: *Les sociologues et le stress: Quelques enseignements des recherches anglo-saxonnes*. "La Nouvelle Revue du Travail," vol. 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.4000/nrt.1413>.
- Loustaunau L., Stepick L., Scott E., Petrucci L., Henifin M., 2021: *No Choice but to Be Essential: Expanding Dimensions of Precarity during COVID-19*. "Sociological Perspectives," vol. 64(5), pp. 857–875. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07311214211005491>.
- Manojkrishnan C.G., Aravind M., 2020: *COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Labor Force: A New Model Based on Social Stress Theory and Prospect Theory*. "Scientific Papers of the University of Pardubice, Series D: Faculty of Economics and Administration," vol. 28(3), article 1070. <https://doi.org/10.46585/sp28031070>.
- Mayer B., Helm S., Barnett M., Arora M., 2022: *The Impact of Workplace Safety and Customer Misbehavior on Supermarket Workers' Stress and Psychological Distress during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. "International Journal of Workplace Health Management," vol. 15(3), pp. 339–358. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWHM-10-2020-0180>.
- Meunier S., Bouchard L., Coulombe S., Doucerain M., Pacheco T., Auger E., 2022: *The Association between Perceived Stress, Psychological Distress, and Job Performance during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Buffering Role of Health-Promoting Management Practices*. "Trends in Psychology," vol. 30(3), pp. 549–569. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-021-00133-0>.
- Micali E., 2023: *Occupational Stress in Healthcare during COVID-19*. "Illness, Crisis & Loss," vol. 31(3), pp. 608–616. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10541373211045764>.
- Michel J.S., Rotch M.A., Carson J.E., Bowling N.A., Shifrin N.V., 2021: *Flattening the Latent Growth Curve? Explaining Within-Person Changes in Employee Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. "Occupational Health Science," vol. 5(3), pp. 247–275. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41542-021-00088-5>.
- Montazer S., Pineault L., Brumley K.M., Maguire K., Baltes B., 2025: *Social Change in the Turbulent Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts of Work-Related Demands on Work-to-Family Conflict, Mastery, and Psychological Distress*. "Society and Mental Health," vol. 15(1), pp. 39–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21568693241250127>.
- Montgomery C.M., Humphreys S., McCulloch C., Docherty A.B., Sturdy S., Pattison N., 2021: *Critical Care Work during COVID-19: A Qualitative Study of Staff Experiences in the UK*. "BMJ Open," vol. 11, article e048124. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-048124>.
- Nehme M., Vieux L., Kaiser L., Chappuis F., Chenaud C., HealthCo Study Team, Brillard O., Courvoisier D.S., Reny J.-L., Assal F., Bondolfi G., Graf C., Zekry D., Stringhini S., Spechbach H., Jacquerioz F., Salamun J., Lador F., Guerreiro I., Coen M., Agoritsas T., Benzakour L., Genevay S., Lauper K., Meyer P., Poku N.K., Landis B.N.,

- Grira M., Allali G., Vetter P., Guessous I., 2023: *The Longitudinal Study of Subjective Wellbeing and Absenteeism of Healthcare Workers Considering Post-COVID Condition and the COVID-19 Pandemic Toll*. “Scientific Reports,” vol. 13(1), article 10759. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-37721-1>.
- Oruh E.S., Mordi C., Dibia C.H., Ajonbadi H.A., 2021: *Exploring Compassionate Managerial Leadership Style in Reducing Employee Stress Level during COVID-19 Crisis: The Case of Nigeria*. “Employee Relations: The International Journal,” vol. 43(6), pp. 1362–1381. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-08-2020-0342>.
- Parent-Lamarche A., Boulet M., 2021: *Workers’ Stress during the First Lockdown: Consequences on Job Performance Analyzed With a Mediation Model*. “Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine,” vol. 63(6), pp. 469–475. <https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000002232>.
- Pearlin L.I., 1989: *The Sociological Study of Stress*. “Journal of Health and Social Behavior,” vol. 30(3), pp. 241–256.
- Pearlin L.I., 1999: *The Stress Process Revisited: Reflections on Concepts and Their Interrelationships*. In: *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*. Eds. C.S. Aneshensel, J.C. Phelan. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, pp. 395–417.
- Pearlin L.I., Bierman A., 2013: *Current Issues and Future Directions in Research into the Stress Process*. In: *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*. 2nd ed. Eds. C.S. Aneshensel, J.C. Phelan, A. Bierman. Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. pp. 325–341.
- Prasiwi N.F., Ardi R., 2021: *Fear of COVID-19: A Conceptual Model for Behavior and Employee Performance in Service and Manufacturing Industries*. In: *4th Asia Pacific Conference on Research in Industrial and Systems Engineering 2021*. Depok, Indonesia: ACM. pp. 121–127. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3468013.3468320>.
- Prokop D. et al., 2021: *Postoje k opatřením a zkušenosti s postupem zaměstnavatelů*. Available at: <https://www.paqresearch.cz/post/postoje-k-opatrenim-a-zkusenosti-s-postupe-m-zamestnavatelu> [accessed: 29.05.2023].
- Rahmat H., Cheang A.W.-O., Tan C.-H., Koo A.-C., Siew W.-F., Amir Sarji E., Cheng K.-M., 2022: *Exploring Pandemic-Related Stress and Resilience among Digital Workers: A Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study*. “F1000Research,” vol. 11, article 384. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.73623.1>.
- Raja U., Jahanzeb S., Malik M.A.R., Baig M.U.A., 2023: *Dispositional Causes of Burnout, Satisfaction, and Performance through the Fear of COVID-19 during Times of Pandemic*. “Applied Psychology,” vol. 72(3), pp. 998–1019. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12417>.
- Robillard R., Saad M., Edwards J., Solomonova E., Pennestri M.-H., Daros A., Veissière S.P.L., Quilty L., Dion K., Nixon A., Phillips J., Bhatla R., Spilg E., Godbout R., Yazji B., Rush-ton C., Gifford W.A., Gautam M., Boaf A., Swartz R., Kendzerska T., 2020: *Social, Financial and Psychological Stress during an Emerging Pandemic: Observations from a Population Survey in the Acute Phase of COVID-19*. “BMJ Open,” vol. 10, article e043805. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-043805>.

- Shah S.H.A., Haider A., Jindong J., Mumtaz A., Rafiq N., 2022: *The Impact of Job Stress and State Anger on Turnover Intention among Nurses during COVID-19: The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion*. "Frontiers in Psychology," vol. 12, article 810378. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.810378>.
- Sorribes J., Celma D., Martínez-García E., 2021: *Sustainable Human Resources Management in Crisis Contexts: Interaction of Socially Responsible Labour Practices for the Wellbeing of Employees*. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management," vol. 28(2), pp. 936–952. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2101>.
- Srivastava R., Gupta S., Sanjeev M.A., 2022: *Comprehending and Measuring Pandemic-Induced Stress among Professionals Due to Lockdown and Work from Home*. "Journal of Public Affairs," vol. 22(1), article e2791. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2791>.
- Tausig M., Fenwick R., 2011: *Work and Mental Health in Social Context*. New York: Springer.
- Umbetkulova S., Kanderzhanova A., Foster F., Stolyarova V., Cobb-Zygadlo D., 2024: *Mental Health Changes in Healthcare Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies*. "Evaluation & the Health Professions," vol. 47(1), pp. 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01632787231201468>.
- Van Zoonen W., Sivunen A., Blomqvist K., Olsson T., Ropponen A., Henttonen K., Vartiainen M., 2021: *Understanding Stressor–Strain Relationships during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role of Social Support, Adjustment to Remote Work, and Work–Life Conflict*. "Journal of Management & Organization," vol. 27(6), pp. 1038–1059. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2021.50>.
- Veverková S., Váňová J., 2022: *Czechia: Working Life in the COVID-19 Pandemic 2021, Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue*. Dublin: Eurofound. Available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/wpef22008.pdf> [accessed: 06.11.2022].
- Wang H., Liu Y., Hu K., Zhang M., Du M., Huang H., Yue X., 2020: *Healthcare Workers' Stress When Caring for COVID-19 Patients: An Altruistic Perspective*. "Nursing Ethics," vol. 27(7), pp. 1490–1500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733020934146>.
- Witzel A., 2000: *The Problem-Centered Interview*. "Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research," vol. 1(1), article 22. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-1.1.1132>.
- Witzel A., Reiter H., 2012: *The Problem-centered Interview: Principles and Practice*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Xie J., Piao X., Managi S., 2023: *Lessons on the COVID-19 Pandemic: Who Are the Most Affected*. "Scientific Reports," vol. 13(1), article 9365. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-36507-7>.