

Early career researchers in art, humanities and theology at the time of external crises – in light of the first round of longitudinal interviews of spring 2023

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper describes the impact of external crises, i.e. the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, inflation and the reform of science and higher education on the work of early career researchers.

Methods: The respondent group comprised early career researchers in humanities, theology and art. A qualitative analysis of free statements provided in the first round of in-depth interviews was performed. The Polish project (2023-) is a continuation of two international Harbingers projects, which included longitudinal interviews with early career researchers and dealt with changes in technology (2016–2018) and the pandemic (2020–2022).

Results: Quotations from the interviews conducted in spring 2023 were used to describe the impact of external crises on the work of early career researchers in the three fields of science. The interviewees usually mentioned being overworked, sometimes – undervalued and, less frequently – the feeling of professional burnout. Financial problems of the young generation of Polish scientists were also brought up.

Value: An attempt was made to characterise the conditions of work of Polish early career researchers in art, humanities and theology.

Key words

Early career researchers. Humanists. Scientists-artists. Theologians. Pandemic. War. Inflation. Reforms of science and academia. Poland.

1. Introduction

This paper presents characteristics of Polish early career researchers' opinions on the impact of several external crises on their research and teaching activities.

The empirical part of the study was carried out as part of the Polish continuation (project NCN No. 2022/45/B/HS2/00041) of two international analyses of scholarly

communication as seen by early career researchers before (Harbingers 1: the years 2016–2019) and during the pandemic (Harbingers 2: 2020–2022). Whereas the international study concerned science and social science researchers, the current study focuses on arts and humanities.

External circumstances always have a great impact on scientists all over the world, as shown by the findings of six rounds of Harbingers longitudinal interviews conducted annually for several years in eight countries: the USA, the UK, Spain, France, Malaysia, China, Russia and Poland – owing to this paper author’s membership of the international research team led by prof. David Nicholas of CIBER Research Ltd. The first three interview rounds (in 2016, 2017 and 2018) revealed the significant impact of technological progress on changes in scholarly communication, which manifests itself in the increasing importance of the open access movement, social media and virtual research teams. The next three interview rounds conducted during the pandemic (in 2020, 2021 and 2022) demonstrated that forms of online communication have become widespread in the world of science (online conferences, online teaching) but that this also applies to alternative scientific information sources, e.g. Research Gate, and illicit services, such as Sci-Hub.

The aim of the Polish continuation of the Harbingers project, i.e. the interviews started in early spring 2023, is to examine the impact of other external events on early career researchers’ work. The latest round of interviews as part of the Harbingers 2 project in Poland, i.e. in spring 2022, revealed a shift in the respondents’ attention from the pandemic to the war in Ukraine, which did not manifest itself in the interviews in the other six countries (Russia was excluded from the project at the time, as required by the founder, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation). Hence, this paper addresses not only the ongoing pandemic and the war across the eastern border but also the economic situation in Poland, which is partly influenced by these factors. It encompasses topics such as inflation and the domestic reforms pertaining to science and higher education.

There are reports in the literature on the subject, focusing mainly on one of the external crises mentioned above, e.g. the feeling of professional burnout (Nicholas et al. 2022; Karwowski 2021; *Interdyscyplinarne...*, 2022; Donina et al., 2022). This paper is an attempt to look more comprehensively at how researchers in the three non-analysed fields of science functioned during a period of overlapping external crises.

2. Study organisation

All parts of the Harbingers project use the same methodology, with longitudinal interviews as its main part, i.e. annual conversations with the same respondents in groups of twenty people in each of the eight countries mentioned above. This

is a great opportunity to observe changes in the attitudes and behaviour of researchers and to compare them within countries, sexes, professional status and within time intervals. The interview questionnaire, with its core unchanged since 2016, has been described in several publications (Świgoń, Nicholas, 2023, 2017) and on the research centre's website (<http://ciber-research.com/harbingers.html>).

The interviews are recorded and, after they are transcribed, sent by e-mail to the respondents for completion. The questionnaire contains close-ended, semi-open-ended and open-ended questions (a total of over 50). The record is manually coded using a heuristic approach and a standardised thematic framework. This paper employs a qualitative response analysis (Mayring, 2000) to several semi-open-ended and open-ended questions in the questionnaire related to the crises and the feeling of overworking, being undervalued and professional burnout. This is supplemented by a quantitative analysis, i.e. the number of affirmative, negative or inconclusive responses (yes/no/yes and no).

The following research questions were formulated:

- Do various external crises have any impact on the research/art activity of early career researchers?
- Do early career researchers feel overworked, undervalued or professionally burned out as a result of these external crises and the reorganization of work caused by them?

The group of respondents comprises 25 researchers in arts and humanities of various public institutions of higher education around Poland. These include 19 doctors and 6 doctoral students – 15 females and 10 males. Numbers were used to maintain the respondents' anonymity (humanities: 2,3,4,8,9,10,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,25; theology: 6,7,20,22,24; art: 1,5,11,12,21,23). Minor editorial changes were made in the quotations, e.g. replacing elements of descriptions which could potentially make it easy to identify a person or removing sensitive data (e.g. on attending therapeutic sessions). A full list of the responses was made available in the repository of open data (<https://doi.org/10.18150/XSMX1M>).

3. Study findings

3.1. External crises

3.1.1. Pandemic Covid-19

The question about the impact of the pandemic on the respondents' research activities was, in fact, a question about the past because no epidemic restrictions were in force in Poland at the time when the interviews were conducted, i.e. in spring 2023. Basically, the respondents focused on the negative effects of the pandemic

(12 people) or, with hindsight, perceived the positive effects of changes in communication from direct to online forms (13 respondents).

The impact of the pandemic on work in artistic fields was more complex. On the one hand, cultural life died down at the time, but on the other, it was also a time of the rapid development of various streaming-supported forms [12].

I kept receiving calls about the concerts being cancelled. At one time, streamed content became popular, i.e. video recordings of concerts and their "live" broadcasts. [1]

For many industries (tourism, gastronomy), the pandemic was a time of uncertainty and even despair, while for me, it was a very good period. I cooperated with Netflix, and I had a lot of work from them. People did not return to the cinemas as soon as the pandemic ended, which is why the streaming platforms produced much more than before the pandemic. We had our hands full. [21]

The difficulties encountered by artists-researchers during the pandemic were related to restrictions in business trips and forced online communication, which, however, had its merits.

I had to move forward with my foreign scholarship by six months (...) My foreign contacts expired, but I hope this is only temporary. We had remote student classes, which had negative consequences for the teaching quality. The pandemic had a positive impact on digitisation and the more common use of tools for online meetings, which is a positive thing. [5]

Due to the pandemic, I couldn't present a vernissage in a traditional form – I had to do it as a 3D tour (...). Teaching on the Internet is difficult, but it presents one with new challenges and motivates one to seek different tasks than before (...). [11]

We had to edit the film remotely. Work on sound and video editing was delayed because this is not as effective when done remotely as working directly with the editor. Certain procedures had to be followed on set, which made our work difficult (...). [23]

Humanists were not bothered by online research work because, basically, they continued to work on their studies. But they were affected by online teaching [2] [3] [8] [17]. They talked about the negative impact on their relations with students [9] and on doing teamwork with students [4]. Certain good sides of online work platforms can be demonstrated by the fact that they are still used as supportive and sometimes as the main form of work with students [25].

Online teaching provided one with an opportunity to learn something new – a new method of conducting classes with new teaching aids (...). The pandemic did not restrict my research work, and it surely motivated me to learn about new technologies and issues and to share my skills with others. [13]

The negative impact on research work involved mainly preventing one from going on work-related trips, including conducting library and archive searches [16] [19] [15] [17]. The usefulness of remote services provided by libraries was appreciated [14], but this was not always sufficient.

The pandemic hindered historians' access to archives and to libraries, which stayed closed for a long time, and we simply couldn't continue most of our research. [9]

On the one hand, the pandemic slowed down my activity, as I had done my work in museums and archives, which were closed at the time (about a year of delay). On the other hand, I do remote work now (new opportunities). [10]

Humanists brought up the issue of online conferences, which were only a different form for some [13], but which presented a difficulty for others [18].

Online conferences are not the best option for building a network of scientific contacts. [25]

One cannot ignore the respondents' personal issues, including those that involve looking after sick persons or after children.

This was aggravated by problems with looking after a small child when the kindergarten was closed during the pandemic, and we had to have online classes from home or do our research work. In fact, for two years, I couldn't focus on my work. I didn't do even half of what I had planned at the time. [19]

This part is concluded with a humanist's statement on post-pandemic changes in the labour market.

The Covid pandemic changed the reality around us. We were forced to switch to the online mode of work. Now, the home office is nothing special, e.g. for programmers, in "the school in the cloud" or other similar solutions. People want to work from any place in the world and are not bound to one place. [4]

The majority of the theologians emphasised the positive aspects of working from home. Although they mentioned some inconveniences, the time of the pandemic was a good period for their research work, reading the literature on the subject and writing their publications.

Paradoxically, except for online teaching, the pandemic had a positive impact on my scientific work. Due to the lockdown, I had more time than usual for my scientific work and for preparing my publications. [24]

Paradoxically, it helped me greatly (...) with certain things that seemed impossible to do, which proved easier when you work from home. This is, for example, about meetings, which took place on very convenient teamwork platforms – all you had to do was choose the time. In effect, I was able to do more than I had thought (...). [20]

The pandemic provided me with various subjects for my publications. I looked not only for research ideas but also for various ways of reaching scientific materials through the web, not only on-site in libraries and archives. Moreover, the pandemic opened new opportunities for online work with students. [22]

Apart from these basically positive statements by theologians, there were some concerning difficulties with trips, reaching sources and meeting other scientists.

The pandemic prevented scientists from going to scientific internships, international conferences and Erasmus+. There were also some obstacles concerning inter-library book loans and participation in library searches. [6]

We lacked contacts with other scientists and acquaintances established in conference corridors. Online conferences involved rather passive listening to the lectures. [7]

3.1.2. War in Ukraine

Unlike the questions about the pandemic, the questions about the impact of the war in Ukraine on the respondents' scientific activity concerned the present. The analysis of the responses revealed their different distribution than in the case of the pandemic, although there were also two out of the three categories of responses. There were more affirmative (15) than negative responses (10) concerning the impact of the crisis on scientific activities, and there were more negative responses compared with the other crises taken into consideration in the interview questionnaire.

The highest negative impact of the war beyond the eastern border was visible in the researchers' mental sphere (no classification according to the field of science was applied in this part).

The war behind the eastern border affected me personally because a female friend of mine is Ukrainian. She is still in Ukraine. Moreover, I have students from Ukraine, so the war is a great mental burden for me. [2]

The war has a great impact on people's psyche, because artists also work on emotions. [23]

The respondents mentioned their own diverse involvement in helping Ukrainians, from material to scientific.

Initially, charity concerts were very popular. I took part in three, the income from which was transferred to foundations providing help to refugees. [1]

I went abroad to provide help there. I believe that helping someone who experiences such a tragedy is something more important than one's personal or scientific development. I had to take some time off, so I had a break from scientific activities. [20]

I support Ukrainian researchers by cooperating with them. I filed a joint grant application with a Ukrainian. [18]

Some interviewees were prevented by the war from carrying out their scientific enterprises [11] [14] [19].

We have concluded a cooperation agreement with the University in Lviv, but I can't carry out my internship and research plans there because of the war. [6]

The war has prevented historians from conducting any research on the history of Ukraine. Moreover, it hinders completing the research on the history of Polish lands in the 19th century because some sources from the times of partitions are kept in archives in Petersburg and in Moscow, which have been closed to us since 24 February 2022. [9]

Many foreign research programmes have been discontinued because of the war. I had to cancel many foreign trips. This war is taking place very close to us, and I think everyone is waiting for it to end. [12]

Several statements were indicative of a greater impact of the war on the respondents' teaching than scientific work [25] [11] [23], as in these quotations:

The war did not have a direct impact on research work. However, it did have an indirect one by teaching students who were affected by the war. Some of them were prevented from participating in lectures by the war. [22]

One of its effects is an increase in the number of students from Ukraine in Poland, which necessitated a certain kind of flexibility (on the part of the lecturers and the university). This diversity of nationalities among students is a great

advantage. On the other hand, the number of Erasmus students from other countries in Poland decreased. [5]

Another respondent talked about the impact of the war on practical activities.

Those who commissioned work began to act more conservatively, for example, reducing production or even withdrawing from Poland, which had an effect on our earnings in those projects. During the pandemic, I had several commissions at the same time, there was one project after another, but things have slowed down since the war broke out, the number of commissions is smaller, and their financial conditions are worse. [21]

As was mentioned earlier, for ten respondents (40%), the war has not had – at least up till now – a direct impact on their work [3] [4] [7] [10] [13] [15] [16] [24].

I would rather go west, for example, to Germany, for scientific purposes. [17]

The war does not affect my scientific work because recently I haven't been dealing with the subjects I used to deal with some time ago when I had to go to St. Petersburg. [8]

3.1.3. Inflation in Poland

The impact of a high domestic inflation rate (in double digits at the time when the interviews were conducted) was felt by a large majority of the respondents (21 people, 84%). Few of the respondents (4) denied such an impact.

Obviously, the main problem was related to low pay and doctoral scholarships received by Polish scientists [5] [9] [16] [17], and the inflation made their poor financial situation worse. This is associated with reforms in science and higher education, which did not result in significant pay rises in this sector.

Salaries at Polish public universities are relatively low, and when they rise, it does not make up for the effect of inflation (for example, a pay rise of 7–8%, with an inflation rate of 20%). The purchasing power of our salaries decreased greatly, which is of particular importance for young scientists, who have to find extra jobs to get extra income. [21]

I'm deeply dissatisfied with an assistant's salary at a Polish university. My first pay (...) – and I had just defended my doctoral thesis – was like a slap in my face. Even before the inflation it was outrageously low, and now it's even worse. [2]

The financial situation of young scientists in Poland deteriorated even more. We look ridiculous in comparison with our colleagues from the West. If Polish

scientist doesn't get a grant or other commissioned work by themselves, it's difficult for them to maintain a satisfactory living standard. [19]

Many early career researchers admitted that having to look for extra work reflected negatively on their scientific work.

The assistant's salary – and young researchers in humanities often start at this point – is very low, and those people simply must take extra jobs, which also affects their scientific work because, for example, instead of working on a publication, they are busy doing the other job. [3]

I must do one and a half jobs, that is, apart from working at the university, I have an extra job. Which means that I have much less time for my scientific work. [8]

If it wasn't for the fact that I'm employed at another place, I couldn't support myself on the doctoral scholarship alone. In general, it's a difficult situation because I have to choose between the duties of a doctoral student and my duties in the other job. And the professors and my scientific supervisor were not always too eager to accept my explanations (...) My fellow doctoral students also must look for extra paid jobs to maintain an acceptable living standard. [20]

The inflation greatly increased the cost of going to conferences (accommodation, journey costs and conference fees) [4] [6] [13] [18] and many other scientific undertakings, such as search trips to other towns, text translation and artistic events (cost of concert or exhibition organisation) [1] [12] [23].

I minimised the trips to archives and museums in Poland for financial reasons. I couldn't afford a week-long research visit to a large city in Poland. [10]

During an economic crisis, art is always less important when funds are concerned. [11]

It's difficult to do one's research when you have no money. The financial schedule for the grant was prepared 4–5 years ago, and now it's all insufficient today because of the inflation (train tickets, accommodation – all the prices have increased). [19]

Funding in philosophy and in Polish science, in general, is very poor. There are not enough funds for translating publications into English, I have to spend my private money, and translation rates are increasing. The salary increases at the university to compensate for inflation were not too large. Luckily, I don't work

as an assistant, but as a lecturer [adiunkt], which entails a higher pay, but it's still below the national average. [25]

The price increases also had an impact on research work because (...) the participation cost for various conferences and domestic and international meetings have increased. When it comes to the increasing fees, for example, for participation in conferences, I can only say that online conferences, which have become common since the pandemic broke out, are a good thing because you can invite professors and experts from abroad, which we couldn't normally afford. [22]

Finally, this incidental mention of the positive aspect of the finances can be expanded by adding that of those four people who did not feel the negative effects of inflation on their scientific activity [15] [7], two explained: *Because I've been taught to live a frugal life and I never complain about money. [24] Currently, I'm on a scholarship from abroad [14].*

3.1.4. Reforms in science in Poland

Although reforms in science and higher education have been underway for a long time, this generation of early career researchers is affected to the greatest extent by the "Constitution for Science", introduced in 2018. Respondents brought up issues related to it, such as changes in science classification and changes in doctoral education, and also financial issues. In this section, only four people definitely denied the impact of reforms on their work, whereas the others either confirmed it (14 respondents) or pointed to various negative effects of the reforms (7). A great emphasis was placed on low salaries, which have been discussed in the previous section (on inflation) and further in the findings section (i.e. one concerning feeling overworked and undervalued).

Changes in the **classification of sciences** applied to three fields dealt with in this study, but humanities most of all, at least in light of the responses obtained. The inconveniences were related, for example, to an inability to assign oneself to a specific discipline, which affects one's teaching and scientific work.

Introducing a new classification of sciences has had a great impact on my research work. I work in a city where the discipline which I'm interested in and which is associated with my study major was not parametrised at any university. In consequence, I had to be added to a different discipline in the doctoral school of my university (...) I also encountered some difficulties in selecting the subject for teaching. [4]

I couldn't write my doctoral thesis in ethnology, from which I graduated, because it was not included in the Polish classification of sciences in 2018–2022. [10]

I'd like to be assigned to a larger number of disciplines, not just to one. On the other hand, one is convenient for my superiors, my university, and my department. [18]

The following are opinions of early career researchers assigned to Polish language studies, isolated in December 2022, who declared two other disciplines earlier.

I chose two other disciplines before the Polish language studies, which was not good for me because I had to get a sufficient score in both. Polish language studies fit better by research interest. It was also beneficial for other reasons, that is, because I will no longer have to publish in English in periodicals abroad. This concerns appreciating the national philology (which is also typical of other countries) and the fact that Polish language studies seem to be a broader formula than literature studies or linguistics. [13]

Polish language studies suit me as a discipline to which I assign all my achievements. Because if I were assigned to two disciplines, I would have to divide my achievements and have high-scoring publications in both. In other words, I can't be a so-called "N zero" (with no publication for four years), that is, a burden on one of the disciplines. And I can assign – in accordance with the rules – 20% of my achievements to a different discipline. I'd like to add that it is not a good idea to have to assign oneself to a specific discipline. [19]

The opinions of the respondent theologians on the changes in their scientific discipline were very interesting – they were consistent in their uncertainty regarding the isolation of biblical studies (it is noteworthy that no early career researchers in this discipline were found in the Rodon database when the respondents for these interviews were sought).

I find it reasonable that a separate field of theological sciences exists. On the other hand, dividing theology into components (theological sciences and biblical studies), which was done close to the end of 2022 by the minister's decision, is not a good idea. I'm afraid that biblical studies are going to "thin down" theology. [6]

Regarding isolating the biblical studies, I don't understand why this particular sub-discipline was isolated from the theological sciences, as this could have been done with several others. [24]

I've heard opinions that isolating two disciplines within the field of theological sciences, i.e. biblical studies and theology, is not quite a good solution. There are fears about keeping a high category in the next parametrisation. Researchers in biblical studies have greater opportunities to publish in internationally

renowned periodicals than other scientists in this field. This is why it would be easier to work on one account, with one category A+ for one discipline. Isolation of biblical studies in the sense of declaring it by researchers has just started, not only in my university, but also in others. It's difficult to say how many representatives will ultimately be assigned to the new discipline (...). [22]

Apart from changes in the classification of sciences, there are some **other changes** of importance to some respondents in the three fields of science under study concerning doctoral education, promotion and researcher evaluation.

Among those welcomed were the replacement of previous doctoral studies with doctoral schools [9], and changes in scientific promotion [5], whereas changes in transitional provisions met with negative opinions [2].

Replacing previous doctoral studies with a new formula for doctoral schools is a good idea. I can compare them both because I started work at the time, and I interrupted my doctoral studies in the old system. The present system of doctoral education is better than the previous one. It may be more difficult to get admitted to a doctoral school now than in the past, but those who succeed have better opportunities, which I didn't have. There's also an obligatory scholarship. [20]

The promotion path in teaching, which was introduced by these science and higher education reforms, is also noteworthy. One can become a professor at a university without habilitation. [21]

A different procedure concerning appointing the board and reviewers. I was in doctoral studies, which were transformed into a doctoral school. There were a lot of ambiguities about the dates and the procedure for the defence of doctoral theses. [11]

Some respondents who commented on the score evaluation of scientific and scientific-artistic activity had only negative opinions.

Regarding the reform of higher education, I'm against evaluating scientists by granting them points. This, for example, applies to low-score conferences, where participation is not profitable because there are very few points one can get from them. Such reforms are not beneficial to the scientific development of early career researchers. [20]

Constant changes in the score for periodicals, for example, a sudden change from 20 to 70 points, are dispiriting. [25]

Like most staff in our university, I was employed as a researcher and a teacher, but some have been transferred to teaching jobs because of the university parametrisation. (...) According to the ministerial regulation, only the functions of director, set designer, costume designer, editor, producer, production manager and the actor/actress in the main role can be regarded as authors, and this can be regarded as an artistic achievement, for which one can receive a ministerial score in an evaluation of artistic achievements (...) the regulation ignores the artistic contribution of such professionals as the digital image technician, make-up artist or camera operator. [21]

This part is concluded by a statement from a respondent who critically summed up the issue of reforms at Polish universities.

I think that the education reforms in Poland, higher and general education, are very harmful. (...) If my work was guided by the ongoing changes in the law and the rules of academic promotion, I could not do my work at all. This would mean the total paralysis of any research initiative. I believe that universities in Poland are no longer research or educational institutions, but bureaucratic ones. (...) These constant curricular changes, changes to the entire course of study, this instability – all this is worrying both for us and for the students. [24]

3.2. Feelings of overwork and burnout

The questionnaire contained questions about the work reorganisation in connection with these external events and also about the feelings associated with 1) being overworked, 2) being undervalued and 3) professional burnout.

Online teaching and other forms of working from home were definitely the most common reasons for reorganisation at the workplace, and they were mentioned in nearly all responses (except one). References to the war in Ukraine were the least frequent (2 people). Financial issues, the economic crisis and inflation (6 times) and science reforms, including changes in science classification (8 times), were mentioned about a dozen times in this part of the interview.

Apart from online teaching, there were no changes caused by the pandemic. The reforms brought about a lot of changes in my faculty, e.g. several departments had to merge to make bigger teams. [7]

New personnel hiring at my university was blocked because of the economic crisis. Changes in the science classification prevented me from preparing a doctoral thesis in the field in which I'm most interested. [10]

As many as 18 people (72%) gave an affirmative response about feeling **overworked**, and only seven people gave a negative response. The reasons for that, as mentioned by the respondents, included difficulties in finding the right balance between scientific work and: teaching [24], administrative duties at the university [7] and an extra job [5], [11], taken not only out of necessity but also out of the need for professional practice useful in teaching [23].

I do several jobs, I'm a pianist, and I'm also a researcher who has research, teaching and administration duties. My professional activities are a network of communicating vessels. In my opinion, feeling overworked as a result of too many professional duties is a standard these days. [12]

I'm permanently overworked. It's not only about the two jobs but also about many organisational duties at the university (...). [13]

I'm overworked. I, and other early career researchers, am required to be committed to organisational activity, for example, helping in the promotion of study majors and coming up with new ideas and initiatives as an organiser of artistic and scientific projects. [15]

In order to be a good teacher, one has to be a practician, involved in various projects all the time. In other words, it's not just doing an extra job to earn some extra money, but gaining new experiences, which we then pass on to students during classes or workshops. I'm personally tired of commuting for such a long distance (...) and of so many classes. It's exhausting. Unfortunately, there is professional exploitation in non-university work, and producers want to get as much as possible from performers and to pay for it as little as possible. [21]

Definitely, especially that the bureaucratic restrictions, for example, applying for internal funding for book purchase or publication translation, require time and commitment at the expense of our scientific work and (...) we have to prepare new monographic lectures (...) again at the expense of the research work. [25]

The doctoral school is highly demanding, and I have to balance it against my work duties, so yes, I'm overworked. [17]

The reasons for feeling overworked, as mentioned by the respondents, included caring and family duties [19] [23]. Several respondents mentioned feeling overworked during the pandemic [8] [18] or continuing online meetings after the pandemic [9].

I was overworked during the pandemic, and I felt something like "mind overheating" – on the one hand, you could do a lot of things at home during the

pandemic, but on the other, our employers and superiors expected more from us than we were actually able to do, and even you had to do several things at the same time (...). [20]

One of the seven short responses, which denied feeling overworked, was given during a foreign scientific internship programme.

I didn't, and I still don't feel overworked. I've always wanted to work at a university, I'm satisfied. [14]

The responses to the question about feeling **undervalued** were divided into more or less equal parts (11 people, 44%, in each) of those giving an affirmative and negative response. The remaining three people were not so much undecided, as they distinguished between being undervalued in terms of one's skills and being undervalued financially [2] [9], as in the following passage:

I win international contests, and I'm highly valued around the world. I'm invited to conferences and workshops abroad. Financially, as a university employee, I feel undervalued. When I compare my salary with the salaries of my foreign colleagues or with the budget for creative activity, I'm deeply frustrated. [5]

Among the reasons for feeling undervalued, 11 respondents in the three fields of science mentioned: low pay at the university [8] [21], absence of a permanent contract [10] [16] [18]; feeling undervalued artistically and scientifically [1] [11] [12] [21], generally, internal crises blocking creative work [1]. Two people mentioned having gone through psychotherapy sessions. The following responses mention other reasons for feeling undervalued, such as failures to receive a grant, being assigned to a different discipline or the hierarchical system at universities.

The situations associated with grants and pressure to publish in high-score periodicals are stressful. My expectations regarding future scientific work were too high during my doctoral studies, and I'm sometimes disheartened when my application for a scientific grant is rejected. It seems to me that if I fail to get a grant twice, my next attempts will not be successful either. [6]

Since I was assigned to a different discipline than I wanted, I feel a little undervalued, a little unwanted (...). All of this makes me feel like a "misfit". [4]

Polish universities are still ruled by a hierarchical system. (...) the approach to doctoral students at universities abroad is different. There, such a student can be a partner – maybe "inexperienced", but still a partner. In the Polish scientific world, we are often treated condescendingly. [14]

The absence of a feeling of being undervalued was mentioned more often in theology (four out of five respondents) than in art (one out of six) and humanities (six out of fourteen).

This is an internal, individual matter. If you have such an inner feeling of being appreciated, you don't need any proof from outside, such as praise from your superiors or awards. I work because of my sense of mission. [22]

My salary is adequate for my work. I meet with kindness in my work, and I can count on help, support and good words. [24]

I don't need extra appreciation from the outside. I don't have to be a scientist. If this work doesn't suit me, I'll quit. (...) Researchers in science, medicine or legal sciences are in a better position, as their work has effects on the economy. Humanities are often regarded as ballast. Obviously, this is wrong and shortsighted. [19]

The proportions of people with(out) **professional burnout** were different, i.e. the number of those denying such feeling was the largest, i.e. 17 (68%), six of them gave an affirmative response, and two gave an inconclusive response.

The following opinion is one of those expressed by a majority – about the absence of professional burnout.

I think this is the kind of work in which – with a proper approach – you are not so much susceptible to burnout as in other jobs. And this is thanks to the large extent of freedom enjoyed by the university staff. [19]

The feeling of **professional burnout** was associated mainly with the time of the pandemic and online teaching [4] [6] [7] in combination with other problems, including poor professional prospects [9] and the feeling of being overworked, which in turn is caused by the need to have an extra job.

I worked only on contracts of mandate and, at the same time, I was writing a doctoral thesis without having a scholarship. I had to support myself, so I took different jobs. I had a feeling of burnout then, and the pandemic only deepened it. Now I have my first contract of employment, for a limited period, but it's a good thing all the same. Nevertheless, I take on various jobs because I must practice all the time in my speciality. [18]

When you go to an artistic university, you imagine that you'll work hard, become an artist and create art (...). Meanwhile, with these artistic ambitions, you graduate, and no one's waiting for you. You just get low-profile projects. It's very rarely the type of "content" you can call art without embarrassment. When

(...) you work 12 hours a day (...), professional burnout comes early – I lose my health, I don't see my child, soon thoughts come: what's the sense of all this? [21].

Two inconclusive responses [16] [25] were rather typical of researchers-teachers because one of them has a feeling of burnout because of the continued teaching at her university, and the other – an intensive period of scientific work.

4. Conclusion

This paper presents the opinions of early career researchers in three fields of science: humanities, theology and art, on the external circumstances under which they conduct their scientific and artistic activity.

In conclusion, one must observe that although all the “external crises”, i.e. the pandemic, the war, the economic situation as well as the reforms of science and higher education, had an impact on the feeling of being overworked, undervalued, and the feeling of professional burnout in early career researchers, the financial aspects, associated with the two crises, i.e. the reforms at universities and a high inflation rate, were the dominant factors. It seems that increasing doctoral scholarships as well as salaries of assistants and lecturers [adiunkt] would release them from having to seek extra jobs and would allow them to focus on scientific work. The respondents were satisfied with isolating Polish language studies in the science classification and with replacing the old form of doctoral studies with doctoral schools. Regarding the pandemic, certain positive aspects were noted in this global drama, e.g. the convenience of online forms of communication within academic circles. On the other hand, conducting online lectures, which is done at some universities, was met with negative comments. The war in Ukraine is associated with a mental burden, which hinders creative work. It has also brought about an increase in the number of female students from Ukraine in Polish universities.

In general, a large majority of the respondents admitted that they felt overworked (72%) when they started work, and a considerable part (44%) felt undervalued. A quarter of the respondents confirmed having a feeling of professional burnout.

This analysis was limited – especially with reference to the past and future international initiatives of the Harbingers team – by the fact that the group of respondents was only from one country, which does not allow for the generalisation of the conclusions. However, although not too numerous, the group is sufficiently representative to provide a picture of difficulties encountered by the present generation of early career researchers in Poland, at least in these three fields of science. Incidentally, these fields of sciences were outside the scope of interest of the international project founders, which is significant in the context of the study findings presented in this paper, especially underfinancing early career scientists-artists and humanists.

Open Data

Świgoń, Marzena (2023). „Początkujący naukowcy w czasach kryzysów”, <https://doi.org/10.18150/XSMX1M>, RepOD.

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Początkujący naukowcy w dziedzinach artystycznych, humanistycznych i teologicznych w Polsce w dobie kryzysów zewnętrznych – w świetle pierwszej rundy wywiadów podłużnych z wiosny 2023 roku

Abstrakt

Cel: Opisano wpływ kryzysów zewnętrznych, tzn. pandemii, wojny w Ukrainie, inflacji i reform nauki i szkolnictwa wyższego na pracę badaczy rozpoczynających swoje kariery naukowe.

Metody badań: Grupę respondentów stanowili początkujący badacze z nauk humanistycznych, teologicznych oraz dziedziny sztuki. Przeprowadzono jakościową analizę swobodnych wypowiedzi z pierwszej rundy wywiadów pogłębionych. Polski projekt (2023-) jest kontynuacją dwóch międzynarodowych projektów Harbingers, które obejmowały wywiady podłużne z młodymi naukowcami w kontekście zmian technologicznych (2016–2018) oraz pandemii (2020–2022).

Wyniki i wnioski: Wykorzystując cytaty z wywiadów z wiosny 2023 roku, opisano wpływ kryzysów zewnętrznych na pracę początkujących badaczy z trzech dziedzin. Najczęściej w tej grupie przyznawano się do odczucia przepracowania, czasami – niedowartościowania, rzadziej – wypalenia zawodowego. Wybrzmiały problemy finansowe młodego pokolenia polskich naukowców.

Oryginalność: Podjęto próbę scharakteryzowania warunków funkcjonowania polskich badaczy rozpoczynających kariery w dziedzinach artystycznych, humanistycznych i teologicznych.

Słowa kluczowe

Początkujący naukowcy. Humanisci. Naukowcy-artyści. Teologowie. Pandemia. Wojna. Inflacja. Reformy nauki i szkolnictwa wyższego. Polska.

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