



Original article

Stress within local community on the Polish-Belarusian border – a case study of the town of Włodawa, Poland

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ABSTRACT

Since mid-2021, the European Union's border with Belarus has become a place of increased migration attempts. However, the specificity of the migration crisis on the border between the European Union and Belarus lies in the fact that it was artificially triggered by the Belarusian authorities in the early summer of 2021 in response to the sanctions imposed on Belarus by the EU earlier in that year. This situation means that local communities living near the border may feel especially threatened and experience inconvenience due the implementation of a state of emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic constituted an additional stress factor. Hence, the aim of the study was to analyse the level of stress among residents of the town of Włodawa caused by the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border and by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was conducted in the period of 01 January 2022–21 February 2022 using a survey method, with paper questionnaires. A short questionnaire with a high level of standardization was used, which consisted of nine closed questions, including three scalograms (one covering ten questions concerning the sources of experienced anxiety, another one, also a 10-item PSS-10 (Perceived Stress Scale) test, and the third one concerning the assessment of events on the Polish-Belarusian border). During the period of the study, the inhabitants of Włodawa were subjected to double stress: related to COVID-19 and resulting from the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. The conducted research shows that the stress was of medium intensity, and was higher among women, the elderly and the poorly educated. Among the concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exogeneous ones dominated, such as difficulties in accessing health services and the media coverage. As regards the events on the Polish-Belarusian border, respondents most often negatively perceived the arrival of large groups of migrants and the activities of Belarusian border services. Contrary to predictions, there were no synergic effects of anger at the authorities due to the imposition of restrictions (related to both COVID-19 and the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border).

KEY WORDS: stress, COVID-19 pandemic, Polish-Belarusian border, Włodawa

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1. Introduction

The migration crisis on the European Union's border with Belarus is another stage of the migration crisis in Europe which has been ongoing since around

2015. Since mid-2021, the European Union's border with Belarus has become a place of increased migration attempts¹. Yet, the specificity of the

¹While in April 2021, the number of people trying to enter the European Union via the so-called Eastern Borders Route, including

migration crisis on the border between the European Union and Belarus lies in the fact that it was artificially triggered by the Belarusian authorities in the early summer of 2021 in response to the sanctions imposed on Belarus by the EU in early 2021. The sanctions were a sign of the EU's support for the protests against the rigged 2020 presidential election, which were suppressed by the Belarusian government (EU HITS BELARUS POTASH..., 2021). The crisis initially concerned the border with Lithuania and Latvia (LATVIA AND LITHUANIA..., 2021), and since August 2021, it extended to its section with Poland (KENNEDY & MORTENSEN, 2021). Migrants from third countries trying to cross the border illegally began to arrive at the border in large numbers. These people came to Belarus legally, mainly as tourists benefiting from simplified visa-free tourism. Their stay in the territory of this country was organized by the Belarusian authorities, who conducted actions in the migrants' countries of origin to promote a possibility of getting to the rich countries of the European Union through its external border. The migrants received support from the Belarusian authorities for air travel organized by the state-owned Belavia airlines to Minsk and were provisioned in that country, as well as assistance from the Belarusian border guards' who brought them to the border and helped them to illegally cross it. Citizens of mainly Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, but also other countries of the Middle East and Africa appeared on the external border of the European Union (BELARUS BORDER CRISIS..., 2021). The actions of the Belarusian authorities began to be considered as an element of "hybrid warfare", "hybrid threat" or "hybrid attack" (ŁUBIŃSKI, 2022; FILIPEC, 2022). According to NOWAKOWSKI (2021), Lukashenko, President of Belarus, aims to create an area of "frozen conflict" in the border zone with NATO, which can be turned into a "hot conflict" at any time. Looking from a broader perspective, the situation on the border of these three countries with Belarus can be considered as an element of Russia's hybrid warfare against the European Union and NATO, which could be supplemented, for example, by Russia's attack on Ukraine or limited gas supplies to the EU.

According to the Frontex Agency, in 2021, 8,184 cases of illegal crossings were detected at the EU's eastern land borders, indicating a more than 10-fold

increase compared to 2020 (FRONTEx..., 2022). The number of prevented attempts to cross the border was many times higher. The growing migratory pressure has prompted EU border countries to take decisive measures to secure the border, including strengthening its protection by the army aiding border services, legal regulations – declaring an extraordinary state in Lithuania on July 2, 2021, and a state of emergency on November 10, 2021, and a state of emergency in Latvia on August 11, 2021 (LATVIA AND LITHUANIA ACT..., 2021) – and building a permanent border line security fence (LAIZANS, 2021). The migration pressure exerted on the Polish part of the border with Belarus forced the Polish authorities to implement similar measures.

This situation means that especially local communities living in close proximity to the border may feel threatened and experience inconvenience resulting from the implementation of special states. The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an additional stress factor. Hence, the aim of the study was to analyse the level of stress among residents of the town of Włodawa caused by the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border and by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In literature, stress and community resilience are most often investigated in connection with far-reaching natural events, e.g. earthquakes or other natural disasters (ROCHIRA ET AL., 2023). There are also numerous events of anthropogenic origin which also trigger stress in local communities. Undoubtedly, migration is such a strong stressful factor. Yet, the research in this respect more often applies to the migrant communities (e.g. OLCESSE ET AL., 2024; TUGGLE ET AL., 2018) than the communities of their hosts (e.g. MELOTTI ET AL., 2017; ŁACIAK ET AL., 2022).

According to JUDZIŃSKA & SENDYKA (2022), the ongoing humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border did not attract mass public attention. The migration crisis on the southern borders of the European Union is much better recognized (e.g. DIMITRADI, 2023; ROBOLIS, 2016) than on the eastern ones. Among previous publications on the migration crisis on the border of the European Union with Belarus, studies analysing it in the context of a hybrid war prevail (LANGE-IONATAMIŠVILI, 2022; ŁUBIŃSKI, 2022; MÉSZÁROS & TÓCA, 2023) or of an international crisis (BHARTI ET AL., 2023; GRZEŚKOWIAK, 2023; KUŻELEWSKA & PIEKUTOWSKA, 2023), focusing on the legal aspect of preventive measures (BODNIEKS, 2023; CHOCHOWSKI, 2021; FORTI, 2023), analysing the situation from the humanitarian and the human

Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, was c. 100 per month, in July it already exceeded 3,000 persons (Klaus (ed.), 2021).

rights perspective (BALICKI, 2022; LANSALLE, 2022) or focusing on the mass media image of the situation on the border (ADAMCZYK, 2022; JAS-KOZIARKIEWICZ, 2023; YELISEYEU, 2023). The purpose of this study was different. It attempts to analyse the stress of the local community simultaneously caused by the crisis on the border with Belarus and by the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors hope that this will expand the knowledge about the local effects of the border crisis caused by the authorities in Belarus.

In the literature, a community is often defined either as a geographical area or as a relational group united by shared interests or a collective identity (ATKINSON ET AL., 2020). This study has adopted a geographical approach involving the inhabitants of the town of Włodawa. Hence, the article contains a section characterising Włodawa.

2. A characteristic of the initial phase of the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border

The Polish border with Belarus is 418.24 km long, which constitutes 35.6% of the total Polish section of the external land border of the European Union (www.strazgraniczna.pl). On the Polish side, the border is adjacent in the northern part to the Podlaskie Voivodeship (246.93 km of the border), and in the southern part to the Lublin Voivodeship (171.31 km). The border in the Podlaskie Voivodeship is mostly a land border without difficult terrain obstacles, while in the Lublin Voivodeship it runs along the River Bug, which is a natural barrier to crossing it.

Figure 1 presents the number of illegal attempts to cross the border throughout 2021 and the first two months of 2022 (when the survey was conducted). Illegal migrants began to appear on the Polish-Belarusian border in the summer of 2021. A sudden surge in the number of attempts to cross the border against the regulations was recorded in August, September and October, after which these activities slowed down during the winter months. In total, 39,697 attempts were made to cross the border illegally in 2021, i.e. over 300 times more than in the whole of 2020, when there were only 129 attempts (www.strazgraniczna.pl).

In response to the growing migratory pressure, combined with the escalation of provocative behaviour of the Belarusian border services towards Polish border guards and soldiers who aided the border protection, the Polish authorities decided to

introduce a state of emergency in the border zone of the Podlaskie and Lublin voivodeships as of 2 September 2021 (ROZPORZĄDZENIE PREZYDENTA..., 2021b). It covered 183 towns located within 3 km of the border line – 115 in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, including the town of Krynki, and 68 in the Lublin Voivodeship, including two towns – Terespol and Włodawa (Fig. 2). The state of emergency was introduced for 30 days and then extended for another 60 days (ROZPORZĄDZENIE PREZYDENTA..., 2021a). As of December 1, 2021, by decision of the Minister of the Interior and Administration, acting on the basis of the amended Act on the protection of the state border, areas near the border were subject to a temporary prohibition of stay in force until March 1, 2022 (ROZPORZĄDZENIE MINISTRA..., 2021), which was extended for another period from March 2 to June 30, 2022 (ROZPORZĄDZENIE MINISTRA..., 2022).

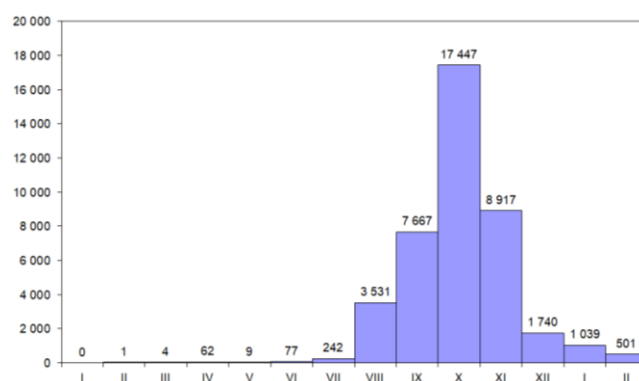


Fig. 1. Crossing the Polish-Belarusian border to Poland against regulations in 2021 and in Jan.-Feb. 2022, by months (Source: own study based on: www.strazgraniczna.pl/dokumenty/1/1-27167.jpg; Dziedzic, 2022)



Fig. 2. Designation of the area covered by the state of emergency in Włodawa (September 2021) (Photo: Renata Anisiewicz)

Based on our own observations conducted in the town of Włodawa, among the implemented restrictions, particular difficulties were caused by the ban on staying in the border area of persons

non-residing or permanently unrelated to the border area. In practice, this meant the introduction of police control of persons and vehicles entering the area covered by the state of emergency and repeated control of vehicles moving between places within the zone. Permanent checkpoints disappeared from the roads on April 16, 2022. This ban had a significant impact on the condition of business entities conducting activities in this area, especially services. The prohibition on organizing mass events and all open forms of cultural and entertainment activities, which particularly affected cultural and sports establishments, was burdensome especially for towns. Additional forces of uniformed services from other regions of the country (Border Guard, army, police) were deployed to protect the border and ensure security in the border area. Their increased number and frequent movement on public roads in previously unthreatened areas intensified the sense of threat among residents, especially in the initial period of the migration crisis. Significant actions were also taken at the border itself, for the protection of which a razor wire fence was built along its entire length. In view of the unrelenting migratory pressure on the land section of the border, the authorities decided to build a permanent, electronically secured barrier with a length of 186 km in the Podlaskie section, the construction of which started on January 25, 2022 (POLAND STARTS CONSTRUCTION..., 2022). In turn, along the River Bug, razor wire coils were laid, and a protective net for animals was set up (Fig. 3). This form of securing the border had never been used before. In selected places along the river, previously absent permanent observation points manned by the army appeared. Restricting access to the River Bug had a negative impact mainly operating on entrepreneurs based on the river's values (canoeing) and on anglers recreationally using its resources.

3. Characteristics of Włodawa

Włodawa is a town² located on the eastern border of Poland and is thus part of the external border of the European Union. The border which separates Poland from Belarus runs along the River Bug. A characteristic feature of Włodawa's location is its close proximity to the triple border point of Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine lying approximately

7 km to the south. Włodawa is the only Polish town whose building development is directly adjacent to the eastern border of Poland (ANISIEWICZ, 2019).

The beginnings of Włodawa date back to the early Middle Ages. It obtained town rights before 1534 (SZCZYGIEŁ, 1991). It developed as a trade centre located at the crossing of the then navigable River Bug, at the intersection of road routes leading from Volhynia to Lublin and from Chełm to Brest. The multicultural character of the town was created by the Polish, Russian and Jewish populations living here for centuries. Before World War II, Jews constituted approximately 70% of the total population of Włodawa though most of them were exterminated during the German occupation.

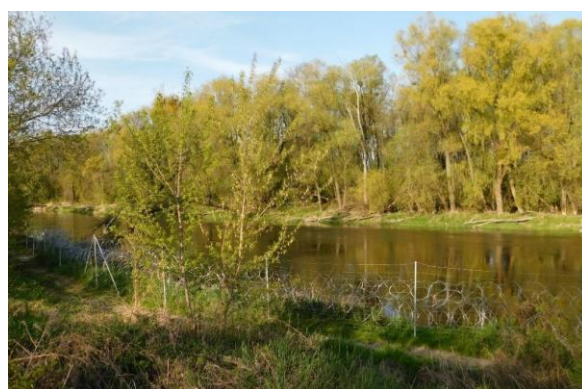


Fig. 3. Securing the border in Włodawa by the River Bug (September 2021) (Photo: Renata Anisiewicz)

After World War II, Włodawa developed as a local service centre with small industries, mainly food, metal and tanning. The location of the border with the Soviet Union was marked by the River Bug, which caused the town to lose its eastern suburbs (where, for example, the railway station was located), constituted a barrier to the greater development of the town. Similarly, its location in a sparsely populated, unurbanized, peripheral area of eastern Poland was not conducive to its development either. Despite this, the number of inhabitants of Włodawa in the period of the Polish People's Republic increased from approximately 4,000 in 1944 to approximately 15,500 in 1991 (ANISIEWICZ, 2009).

The political and economic transformation of Poland at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s initiated a period of stagnation and regression for Włodawa. This was associated with the collapse of unprofitable companies, limitations of the labour market, a slowdown in housing construction, and consequently the depopulation of the town and its ageing

²According to the classification of Local Administrative Units, this is level LAU-2.

population. Negative demographic trends result from migration outflows, especially of young people, and from a decrease in the birth rate, which has been negative since the second decade of the 21st century (LOCAL DATA BANK, STATISTICS POLAND). As a result of these processes, the number of inhabitants of Włodawa at the beginning of 2022 was 12.8 thousand.³ A similar process is taking place in almost all of eastern Poland (KINIORSKA & PYTEL, 2022).

Opportunities for the development of the town, currently performing mainly administrative and service functions, are seen in the development of tourism based on the multicultural heritage of Włodawa. This heritage is made up of historic temples of three denominations: the late Baroque Roman Catholic St. Louis church, a Classicist Orthodox church and a unique complex of three synagogues from the 18th century (currently the Museum – Synagogue Complex). They fit into the preserved urban layout with the market square, whose centre is occupied by a unique 18th-century complex of old stalls, called a quadrangle. The town's tourism potential also lies in the vicinity of the Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District, which is characterised by the presence of karst lakes available for tourism activities (including White Lake with the most developed leisure infrastructure in the Lublin Voivodeship) and naturally valuable swamp and forest areas (ANISIEWICZ, 2021). Hence, the state of emergency introduced in the town affected it so severely.

The tourist potential of Włodawa could be raised by its border location near the triangle of borders. The barrier to the development of tourism, as well as other fields of the economy in this area, is the lack of a possibility to cross the border near the town due to the absence of a crossing point in the form of a bridge. The nearest border crossing to Belarus (Sławatycze-Domaczewo) is located approximately 30 km to the north, while to Ukraine (Dorohusk-Jagodzín) is approximately 50 km to the south. However, given the current situation in Belarus and Ukraine, this neighbourhood can be seen as a barrier to development.

4. Data and methods

The study was conducted using a survey method with paper-form questionnaires. A short questionnaire with a high level of standardization

was used, consisting of nine closed questions, including three scalograms (one covering 10 questions concerning the sources of experienced anxiety, another one also a 10-item PSS-10 (Perceived Stress Scale) test (see ROBERTI ET AL., 2006), and a third one concerning the assessment of events on the Polish-Belarusian border). Two methods of questionnaire distribution were applied. The first one was by local government institutions of the town of Włodawa (municipal office, school, library) and NGOs (third-age university). The second one – using the snowball method – was based on local informants. Only people registered in the town of Włodawa were surveyed. The fact that during the survey period only people registered in the town or performing specific tasks in the town (which was confirmed by a special permit) could stay in the town constituted a major problem. Therefore, one of the co-authors (Renata Anisiewicz), who had the right to stay in Włodawa, conducted the survey.

The survey was planned to be conducted in the period of January–February 2022. However, it was interrupted on February 22nd, 2022. This happened because Włodawa not only borders on Belarus (from which the Russian attack on Ukraine was launched that day), but it is also located very close to the Polish-Ukrainian border. Therefore, an assumption was made that the initiated Russian-Ukrainian war would be an additional strong stressor for the inhabitants of Włodawa, which could distort the study results. A total of 427 surveys were collected. The respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Due to the unequal size of the compared population groups, the Kruskal-Wallis H test (HOLLANDER & WOLFE, 1973) and the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test (MANN & WHITNEY, 1947) were used for intergroup comparisons. In the case of obtaining a statistically significant result of intergroup comparisons, *post hoc* tests were conducted to minimize the error resulting from unequal sample sizes (DUNN, 1961).

Cronbach's α for the PSS-10 test in the entire sample was 0.84, and for subscales F1 and F2 – 0.83 and 0.76, respectively. The significance level included in the analyses was set at $p < 0.05$. Detailed results are presented in Table 2. Statistical analyses were conducted with the use of the programming language for statistical analyses R version 4.3.1 (R CORE TEAM, 2023) and RStudio version 2023.09.1 (POSIT TEAM, 2023).

³Information obtained from the Town Hall of Włodawa.

Table 1. Structure of the surveyed population in terms of demographic characteristics (n, %) (Source: own study)

	n	%
Total	427	100
Gender:		
Female	231	54.1
Male	196	45.9
Age:		
18–24	84	19.7
25–34	93	21.8
35–44	92	21.6
45–54	60	14.1
55–64	56	13.1
65 and more	42	9.8
Number of years in education:		
0–9	37	8.7
10–13	187	43.8
14–16	102	23.9
17 and more	101	23.7
Vaccinated against COVID-19:		
Yes	286	67.0
No	69	16.2
Refuse to answer	72	16.9

Table 2. Analysis of the reliability of the PSS-10 scale and the F1 and F2 subscales (Source: own study)

	Cronbach's α
PSS-10	0.84
P1	0.83
P2	0.76

5. Results and discussion

Table 3 shows the level of the stress index measured by the PSS-10 test. In the entire sample, it amounted to 17.29 (SD $\pm$ 6.27). This index means an average level of perceived stress. Women experienced a higher level of stress (18.38) than men (16.02). In the case of people aged 18–64, it fell within the range of 16.45 to 17.62. Only in the case of the oldest people (65 years old and over), did the level increase to 18.74. The level of education ambiguously differentiated the amount of perceived anxiety, although poorly educated people exhibited an elevated level (18.41). Vaccination, or not, against COVID-19 did not clearly differentiate the respondents in terms of the perceived level of stress.

More detailed data on the perceived level of stress is provided in Table 4. It shows that high levels of stress occurred twice as often (9.1%) among women as among men (4.6%). The study did not distinguish whether this was an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic

or of the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. The obtained results correspond to findings in other studies. METIN ET AL. (2022) showed that fear of COVID-19 was more prevalent among women than among men. In turn, it follows from HUSETH-ZOSEL'S research (2024) that women are significantly more likely to experience stress due to COVID-19 than men. WILLIAMS ET AL. (2024) also point to higher anxiety among women caused by COVID-19. Thus, the situation in Włodawa in this respect can be considered typical.

Numerous studies on the elderly show that they manifest increased levels of stress caused by COVID-19 (BANERJEE, 2020; ŞENTÜRKHTPS ET AL., 2023). However, on the other hand, VILLAUME ET AL. (2023) report that anxiety and depression are significantly more prevalent in adults aged 18–39 years, with rates of 40% and 33%, respectively, compared to 31% and 24% among adults aged 40 years and older. This partially corresponds to the findings obtained in Włodawa, as here, the highest percentage (10%) of people with high levels of stress was recorded in the cohort of 45–54-year-olds. A slightly lower one occurred in cohorts of people aged between 25–34 and 18–24 years old. On the other hand, among people aged 65 and over, this percentage was half as low (4.8%), and the lowest one (1.8%) was among people aged 55–64. Yet, one must bear in mind that among people aged 65 and over, there was the lowest percentage (16.7%) of those with low levels of stress. Such results should be considered as partially atypical. Perhaps the increased level of stress in the cohort of 45–54-year-olds in comparison to the elderly can be linked to the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. But the rejection or confirmation of this hypothesis requires further in-depth research.

Among the least educated individuals (0–9 years of education), a very small percentage of those experiencing low levels of stress (8.1%) was found, and no individuals reported experiencing high levels of stress. Those experiencing moderate stress clearly dominated (91.9%). In the remaining three categories of education (10–13 years of education, 14–16 years, 17 and more years), the results were different. There was a much higher percentage of individuals experiencing low levels of stress (23.5–31.7%). Simultaneously, there were individuals experiencing high levels of stress (7.0–8.8%), while the percentage of those experiencing moderate stress decreased (down to 58.8–69.5%). These results are inconclusive and do not allow us to draw

conclusions regarding the impact of education on the level of perceived stress. This corresponds to findings in other studies. CORONADO-VÁZQUEZ (2024) found that there were no statistically significant differences in the perception of stress due to the

level of education. In turn, results obtained by JIANG ET AL. (2022) and MAZZA ET AL. (2020) showed significant associations between lower education and worse mental-health outcomes.

Table 3. PSS test results crossed by independent variables (n, m, SD, p-value) (Source: own study)

	n (%)	PSS-10 score mean ± SD	P-value
Total	427	17.29 ± 6.27	-
Gender:			
Female	231 (54.1)	18.38 ± 5.90	<0.001
Male	196 (45.9)	16.02 ± 6.45	
Age:			
18–24	84 (19.7)	17.54 ± 6.45	0.135
25–34	93 (21.8)	17.62 ± 6.94	
35–44	92 (21.6)	16.45 ± 5.72	
45–54	60 (14.1)	16.93 ± 6.67	
55–64	56 (13.1)	17.07 ± 5.31	
65 and more	42 (9.8)	18.74 ± 6.08	
Number of years in education:			
0–9	37 (8.7)	18.41 ± 4.00	0.109
10–13	187 (43.8)	17.78 ± 6.22	
14–16	102 (23.9)	16.47 ± 6.60	
17 and more	101 (23.7)	16.82 ± 6.62	
Vaccinated against COVID-19:			
Yes	(286)	17.43 ± 6.16	0.511
No	69 (16.2)	16.70 ± 6.69	
Refuse to answer	72 (16.9)	17.32 ± 6.32	

Table 4. Comparison of the level of perceived stress in the study groups (Source: own study)

	Low level of stress	Average level of stress	High level of stress	P-value
Total	26.2	66.7	7.1	-
Gender:				
Female	21.2	69.7	9.1	0.014
Male	32.1	63.3	4.6	
Age:				
18–24	27.4	63.1	9.5	0.483
25–34	28.0	62.3	9.7	
35–44	26.1	69,6	4.3	
45–54	25.0	65.0	10.0	
55–64	30.4	67.9	1.8	
65 and more	16.7	78.6	4.8	
Number of years in education:				
0–9	8.1	91.9	0.0	0.009
10–13	23.5	69.5	7.0	
14–16	32.4	58.8	8.8	
17 and more	31.7	60.4	7.9	
Vaccinated against COVID-19:				
Yes	23.8	69.2	7.0	0.242
No	36.2	55.1	8.7	
Refuse to answer	26.4	68.1	5.6	

Research by CHAUDHURI & HOWLEY (2022) shows that vaccination against COVID-19 significantly improved the mental well-being of persons in the groups of the elderly and the clinically vulnerable, and much less in groups least at risk from COVID-19. In the case of Włodawa, the results are inconclusive, as among the unvaccinated people simultaneously there was a higher level of those with a low (36.2%) and a high (8.7%) level of stress compared to those vaccinated (23.8% and 7.0%, respectively).

Table 5 presents the concerns of Włodawa residents related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents could choose any number of concerns. Responses regarding exogenous conditions, such as difficulties in access to health services (55.5% of the respondents), other people's attitudes (49.4%) and media coverage (44.7%) were most often indicated.

Very few respondents (7.3%) said they had no worries. To a large extent, these results correspond to those obtained in similar studies for Tri-City and Kielce (MICHALSKI ET AL., 2023). Somewhat surprising is the low number of statements that the restrictions imposed by the government cause worries/anger (15.5%), because at that time Włodawa was additionally subject to restrictions resulting from the state of emergency due to increased illegal migration from Belarus. It was expected that this would have a synergistic effect with the restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and this percentage would be much higher. Perhaps a fear of COVID-19 had an impact on such a low percentage of persons dissatisfied with the restrictions (as suggested in the research by VASILOPOULOS ET AL., 2023).

Table 5. Concerns connected with the COVID-19 pandemic in the study groups (%) (Source: own study)

Is there anything that worries (or angers) you about the ongoing epidemic?	Total	Vaccinated		P-value
		Yes	No	
My health	21.8	22.4	15.9	0.324
The health of my loved ones	35.4	38.5	26.1	0.070
Restrictions imposed by the authorities	15.5	15.4	18.8	0.469
Situation on the job market	28.6	28.0	30.4	0.766
Pressure to get vaccinated	31.9	21.0	63.8	0.000
Difficulties in access to health services	55.5	57.7	50.7	0.344
Other people's attitudes	49.4	53.8	37.7	0.020
Media coverage	44.7	39.9	46.4	0.342
My worries not related to the pandemic	20.6	20.6	18.8	0.868
I don't have any worries	7.3	6.3	8.7	0.433

The study participants were asked to assess the events on the Polish-Belarusian border (see Table 6). The respondents most often negatively assessed (responses "rather negative" and "definitely negative") the fact of large groups of migrants arriving at the border and trying to get to Poland (67.5%) and the activities of the Belarusian border services (68.4%). In turn, the activities of the Polish border services were mostly assessed positively (60.4%, "definitely positive" and "rather positive"). This partly corresponds to the image created by the Polish mass media (cf. JAS-KOZIARKIEWICZ, 2023). The aid provided to migrants was mostly assessed positively. Thus, 46.6% of the respondents positively assessed the assistance provided to migrants by people arriving in border municipalities, and 43.6%

the assistance provided to migrants by residents of border municipalities. The fact that the Polish authorities had introduced a state of emergency was assessed equally positively (34.4%) and negatively (34.4%).

The respondents were asked, "Do you feel any changes in your daily life due to the events on the Polish-Belarusian border?" 53.6% answered yes, and 46.4% answered no. The respondents who declared feeling some changes in their daily lives were asked about the nature of the changes related to the events on the Polish-Belarusian border. For nearly three quarters of the respondents, these changes were negative (70.7%), while some were neither positive nor negative (22.7%), and positive (6.6%).

Table 6. Assessment of the events on the Polish-Belarusian border (%) (Source: own study)

	Definitely positive and rather positive	Neither positive nor negative	Rather negative and definitely negative	I have no opinion on the matter
Arrival of large groups of migrants at the border wanting to enter Poland	3.8	17.6	67.5	11.2
Activities of the Polish border services	60.4	19.2	12.7	7.7
Activities of the Belarusian border services	1.4	17.3	68.4	12.9
Assistance provided to migrants by residents of border municipalities	43.6	26.5	13.1	16.9
Assistance provided to migrants by people arriving in border municipalities, e.g. volunteers, doctors, journalists	46.6	24.8	15.0	13.6
The introduction of a state of emergency by the Polish authorities in border municipalities	34.4	22.3	34.4	8.9

6. Summary

The migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border is part of the hybrid war waged against Poland (cf. KONIECZNY, 2022), which generates several threats of a religious and cultural nature, an increase in organized crime, etc. (cf. ŚLIWA & OLECH, 2022). These threats also include destabilization in the border region (ZDANOWICZ, 2023). Therefore, during the period covered by the study, the residents of Włodawa were subjected to double the amount of stress: that related to COVID-19 and that resulting from the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. After the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine (due to the location of Włodawa close to the Polish-Ukrainian border), a third stressor appeared, but it was not covered by the study.

The research shows that stress was higher among women than men, which is also noted in other studies. Its elevated level was recorded among youths and elderly people. It was also slightly higher among the less educated. Among the concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were exogenous ones, such as difficulties in accessing health services, other people's attitudes and media coverage. With regard to the events on the Polish-Belarusian border, as expected, the respondents most often negatively assessed the arrival of large groups of migrants and the activities of the Belarusian border services. Contrary to expectations, there were no synergic effects of anger at the authorities due to the imposition of restrictions (related to both COVID-19 and the situation on the Polish-Belarusian

border), which can be partly explained by a fear of COVID-19.

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