

Foreword

This publication is dedicated to the 8th International Multidisciplinary Research Conference “SOCIETY. HEALTH. WELFARE”, which took place at Rīga Stradiņš University (Latvia) on March 24–26, 2021.

The title of the conference unveils the context of the research topic integrity, especially given the fact that the conference was held during the COVID-19 pandemic. The articles that have been prepared basing on the reports presented at the conference will be of interest not only to scientists and researchers, but also to politicians, practitioners, community members, and students.

The publication consists of three parts, the content of which correlates with the title of the conference “SOCIETY. HEALTH. WELFARE”.

The first part, named “SOCIETY”, tackles a wide range of issues that are very relevant to the society of today and are faced by people not only in Latvia but also in many parts of the world. These issues include concerns related to family stability in the context of emigration, access to intergenerational solidarity strengthening, aging society’s needs, challenges of working remotely, and international experience in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research on the questions attributed to an aging society plays an extensive role in this section. In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in the attention paid to European demographic policy: the balance between birth rates and death rates; economic migration processes of economically active youth, which affect the expression of intergenerational solidarity; employment and health problems of the elderly. Studies have shown that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the problems encountered by the elderly have taken on the nature that requires a political solution. The articles **“Loneliness of seniors in long-term care institutions and COVID-19 restrictions”**, **“Access to healthcare during COVID-19 among the aging population in Latvia”**, **“Impact of the first wave of COVID-19 on the employment of older people in Latvia, the Baltic States, and Europe”** reveal the problems that affect the elderly and that are difficult to solve “Right Here, Right Now”. The research covers the issues that include the employment of the older generation in the COVID-19 situation by assessing their ability to work remotely; individualisation of services in solving the problems of loneliness and social isolation of the elderly in care homes; access to health care for the elderly as the necessity for the integrity of social and medical services; search for strategies for professionalization of social workers.

The challenges of working remotely in the COVID-19 situation also call for political solutions. A few years ago, the question was raised whether work from home was the “mission (im)possible”. The functions and content of remote working have been defined in the Employment Legislation and Labour Codes of various countries. However, the role of this issue in the real workspace has been very insignificant. In the COVID-19 situation, remote work has become an important form of work. Only now, it has been realized that employers are still not prepared to assess the remote work risk factors that fall under their legal obligations. The study **“Lack of workplace risk assessment as a predictor of adverse health effects for teleworkers - results from the survey on Life with COVID-19 in Latvia”** is very timely since the course of the COVID-19 pandemic is difficult to predict in time. The study results notify company managers (employers) on the health problems of employees and encourage the sharing of international good practice to avoid the impact of remote work risk factors on health.

The assessment of the international good practice is also vital in the context of pandemic management. The pandemic has affected all regions of the world. However, different

countries and groups of countries have been developing and implementing different COVID-19 management strategies and models to reduce the negative impact of the pandemic. The research article “**Containment of COVID-19: international experience and management strategies**” on the management strategies of COVID-19 in Europe and other regions affirms that both liberal, repressive and hybrid strategies are being implemented in the management of the pandemic. Adoption and implementation of relevant strategies are related to the epidemiological situation in a country, legal system framework, cultural traditions, and technological advancement. The study has shown that population of Latvia do not have enough and convincing information on the actions of the government in managing the pandemic. The authors of the article conclude that according to Eurobarometer surveys the actions of governments in Europe are generally assessed negatively.

The second part of the publication, which goes under the title “HEALTH”, refers to the research that covers a wide range of health care settings. The research responds to current health issues and reveals innovative approaches in finding COVID-19 pandemic management solutions. The article “**Developing the model for cross-sector cooperation for promoting health and wellbeing**” focuses on one of the concerns and presents a model for cross-sector cooperation. The research was developed within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region project “Urban Labs for Better Health for All in the Baltic Sea Region”. (Healthy Boost). The model has been designed on the analysis of the research literature and the self-assessment of inter-sector cooperation in the field of health promotion in the cities and municipalities of Latvia, Poland, Russia, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Sweden. The aim of the Healthy Boost project was to improve the capacities of local authorities to enhance health of citizens through cross-sector cooperation. Its main objective was to make urban policies for health and wellbeing more innovative, effective and integrated. The model, which emphasizes the content of inter-sector collaboration (risk identification, leadership, coordination, communication, and motivation) and the four phases of collaboration (iteration, planning, implementation, and evaluation), can be used to successfully manage the challenges of inter-sector collaboration in the context of health promotion and societal well-being, and in the COVID-19 situation.

Another innovative area of research in this part of the publication is the Pharmaceutical Sector. The analysis of the impact of risk factors in the pharmaceutical work environment while producing various medicines refers to a serious area of occupational safety, and thus is of interest to the pharmaceutical community. However, the research of Estonian researchers presented in the article “**Provision of community pharmacy services during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic in Estonia - experiences and future implications**” will find the audience not only among pharmacists, researchers, and the general public, but health policy makers too. In the face of the problematic access to health care services during the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacies have expanded their operating space. The pandemic has sparked changes in the content and structure of traditional community pharmacy services. The use of e-pharmacy services has increased significantly. The need to expand the functions of pharmacists has emerged. The study offers the idea that in a critical situation, e.g. in a COVID - 19 pandemic, they can play the roles of a health consultant, a psychologist, and a social worker. Researchers call for this experience to be used as a basis for discussions on the professional role of pharmacists and the opportunities for pharmacists to collaborate more effectively with other healthcare professionals in the future.

The study by Bulgarian researchers considers how the pandemic influences the rhythm of daily life activities. Although the article “**Motor activity of nursing students in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic**” analyzes just one occupational group – students as future nursing specialists - readers can convert the analyzed issues on motor skills into the context of other social and occupational groups. High workload as well as a variety of

restrictions on public life gives birth to problems that “invisibly” creep into the lives of each of us during the pandemic. The results of the study correlate with international studies that highlight the need to seek alternative strategies to reduce human inactivity, especially in a situation when a country finds itself in a quarantine status with restricted access to active leisure and social life activities.

The conference discussed research findings that have a direct impact on our daily lives and are known but underestimated. The research articles **“Influence of different types of real-time feedback on hand washing quality assessed with neural networks / simulated neural networks”**, **“Prominent seasonality of 25 (OH) vitamin D deficiency in Latvia: age and gender-related variations and testing regimen”** consider theoretical and practical approaches to public health education as health care prevention. Hand washing as a self-evident phenomenon has gained paramount importance during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the innovative approaches to hand washing techniques presented in the article may attract a particular interest of those working in the healthcare system.

The article by Latvian researchers entitled **“Good death’ – the circumstances in which it would be best for a person to die. The representative survey of the Latvian population”** will be of interest to any reader. The survey has revealed the philosophical and social context of this problem. It provides new insights into human death perception, highlights differences in attitudes toward death across socio-demographic groups, and reveals a statistically significant link between human perceptions on ‘good death’ and a few demographic and social factors, including health care promotion.

The third part of the publication “WELFARE”, focuses on the research that considers the platform for well-being at both the individual and societal levels. In their research, the authors view the well-being through social, economic, physical, legal, mental, and other factors, which influence the quality of life.

A study conducted by Slovak researchers and entitled **“Organizational culture in social services - focused on the workers’ well-being”** identifies the positive factors in the work environment (microclimate, opportunities for improvement) that affect workers’ well-being. The base of the study is the qualitative analysis of the documents, which reveal the organisational culture of Slovak social service providers. Today, social work institutions that provide social services face challenges and dilemmas, which affect the quality of these services both in Slovakia and in other European countries. Therefore, assistance and support for a social worker cannot be just formal. The well-being of employees and the quality of service provision depend on the professional qualifications of each employee, the microclimate of each institution, real support, and overall responsibility of an individual and administration.

The research of the well-being of employees extends into the analysis of burnout syndrome issue, which Lithuanian researchers present in the articles **“Individual factors that cause professional burnout syndrome in social workers, employed in community rehabilitation centre for addictive diseases”** and **“Relationships between professional burnout and job demands, resources among workers in an industrial plant in Lithuania”**. Despite the occupational differences (social workers and industry workers), burnout syndrome is associated with both individual factors and organizational ones. In the context of the experiences of social workers, more emphasis is placed on individual factors; factors related to the lack of professional and general competencies; factors related to client performance. Industry workers and administration staff place more emphasis on organizational justice (organizational culture) as an important precondition for burnout.

In a situation of occupational burnout, people often turn to a psychologist. The problem of psychologist’s identity, the content of psychologist’s intervention functions is a frequent object of research since it affects the expression of burnout and the well-being of the

psychologist's work. Research by Latvian and Portuguese researchers on the expression of professional identity of psychologists, their understanding of the goals and functions of psychological intervention confirms this (**"The goal of psychological intervention and performed functions of psychologists as an aspect of the professional identity of psychologists: Latvian sample"**).

The well-being of the society depends on the contribution of each citizen to themselves and to those around them. The conference reports viewed the research, which covered the impact of volunteering phenomenon on the development of a volunteer's personality, revealing the inner powers and ability of each of us to take responsibility for our own lives, giving priority to personal responsibility for life decisions. Taking the responsibility for one's own well-being also includes taking the responsibility for the well-being of the society. The article, which considers the influence of non-formal adult learning on strengthening communities, correlates with the phenomenon of volunteering in the society. The study on the activities of the coordinator of non-formal adult education, when the community need for learning is realized in response to the goals of the lifelong learning platform, reveals another approach to strengthening the well-being of the society through education. Attractive and promising training for adults that meets their needs and allows them to see the benefits of learning outcomes and their applicability in everyday life is the result of the community well-being.

The conference reports also addressed the issue of the protection of children's rights as the basis for the well-being of a child. Latvian researchers provide a comparative analysis of legislation that responds to children's rights in Latvia and Sri Lanka. With reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) the research considers the legal systems of the two countries in different socio-cultural, economic, and geographical contexts (Europe and South Asia). The study emphasizes that the implementation of children's rights requires the coherence between local and international policies and the purposeful functioning of the institutional structure.

At the end of the third part of the publication, the refugee integration issue is analyzed, which is currently the key concern in the context of events taking place in Latvia, Lithuania, and other parts of the world. The article **"The importance of narrative learning and reflexivity at work with foreigners granted asylum and the context of a non-governmental organization"** basis on the insights presented in the dissertation qualitative research on the importance of narrative learning and reflexivity in working at non-governmental organizations with foreigners who were granted asylum. Although migration issues are receiving increased media, political and public attention, the Baltic States have relatively little experience on the matters dealing with migration and refugee integration. The study concludes that "reflecting about their practice critically, the workers can create new narrative identities, and understand better and analyse their own identities, values, choices, practices, and wider local and international contexts". It is therefore appropriate to explore further narrative learning and the narratives of NGO staff working with refugees, as such staff could increase public awareness of the topic and deepen empathy for refugees. The success of refugee integration can be regarded as their well-being.

At the end of the foreword, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of the Scientific Editorial Board, the Scientific Editorial Council and the authors of the studies included into this publication for the granted opportunity to gain information on interesting theoretical and empirical findings. The publication is a scientific product, which reports the

establishment of new intellectual and organizational paradigms that respond the issues and challenges the society faces today in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Arunas Acus
Professor, doctor of Humanities (Philosophy)
Klaipeda University, Lithuania