

## 'NON-ADULT' ADULTS. GENERATION Y

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### ABSTRACT

**Aim.** The aim of the pilot study was to identify how young adults belonging to the Y generation, who work under civil law contracts, perceive their life situation.

**Methods.** The survey was conducted online via Skype. The qualitative mini-interviews involved four people aged 24 to 29 who have obtained secondary and higher education.

**Results and conclusions.** The results indicated a sense of dissatisfaction among people from generation Y and a fear of the anticipated future. Among the goals of young adults, priority is given to earning money that allows them to live in dignity. In the opinion of the respondents, it is mainly related to working under an employment contract with all its benefits.

**Keywords:** working poor, precariat, precarious employment, becoming adult

### INTRODUCTION

With the end of the 20th century, professional and financial stabilization were no more, giving the possibility of anchoring many age groups, especially the so-called young adults, who today are people from the generation Y, born in the years 1984–1997. It is a generation of Poles free from wars and uncertainty about the fate of the country in which they live, brought up in capitalism and prosperity. The school period of the “millennials” had nothing in common with the childhood of their parents. Gen Y is well cared for by both the parents and the education system. Surrounded by the care of their loved ones from an early age, they have “a strong sense of security and are optimistic about the future” (Wrzesień 2007, p. 11). As children, they occupy a central position in the family, which results in the belief that they can do everything (Wrzesień 2007, p. 138). They are well educated, yet often incompetent in the matters of daily life, which is reflected in their delaying of adulthood:

Both in Poland and in many other countries there is a clearly noticeable tendency to postpone the time of full entry into adulthood, perceived as taking up the expected social roles (...). At an increasingly later age do young people decide to enter into a permanent relationship, start a family, give birth to the first and the next child, leave the family home, live independently and manage their own household as well as take up a relatively stable job. It can be said that compared to the situation from several or several dozen years ago, we are now dealing with an increasingly longer period of adolescence to full adulthood. (Brzezińska et al., 2011, p. 70)

### TWO DIMENSIONS OF ADULTHOOD

In social sciences, the categories of adulthood can be considered in two dimensions: objective and subjective (Oleszkowicz & Misztela, 2015, p. 42; Piotrowski, 2013, p. 16). The first dimension is concerned with taking on roles and tasks assigned to this period of life; and the second one is based on the individual's internal belief in having competences and the traits ascribed to adulthood.

Erikson (1968), Havighurst (1948) and Pietrasiński (1990) are the proponents of the first approach. Thus, early adulthood is a period in which such stages should take place as: graduation from school, becoming employed, growing a family, fulfilling social and civic duties and developing one's own philosophy of life. The authors do not mention the need to discover and acquire professional and social competences in terms of processes. Mary & Nordholt (2004, p. 41) argue, however, that around the age of 30, a young person is only beginning to discover their own goals. This view of early adulthood correlates with the concept of "becoming adult" by Arnett (2000) - this is the developmental period between adolescence and adulthood, in which people aged 25–29 belong (as cited in: Zagórska et al., 2012, p. 64). It is characterised by: exploration of identity, focus on oneself, instability and a sense of being "in between". It is also a time of experimenting with various possibilities.

Malewski (1991) and Urbański (1995) perceive adulthood as a dynamic, life-long process of an individual's personality becoming subject to progressive socio-moral changes. This understanding of adulthood accompanies the subjective approach of becoming an adult, which includes such attributes as responsibility expressed in the readiness to bear consequences for one's own actions, controlling emotions and having a shaped worldview (Oleszkowicz & Misztela, 2015).

According to Piotrowski (2013, p. 23), the relationship between the objective and subjective criteria of adulthood is not clear-cut. People who ranked the subjectivist indicators of adulthood on the list compiled by the researchers reported completely different factors in the general question of who and what is an adult. The sense of adulthood (maturity) also changed in the situations of having children - when the respondents became parents, this indicator gained importance in determining adulthood. For their childless peers, it was not of key importance.

The readiness to take off into adulthood is also conditioned by the events and experiences in which the young adult participated over the course of their life. This is well illustrated by the model of Bronfenbrenner, in which five systems are described on a timeline, representing the life line of a person entering adulthood (Śniegula & Wiecheć, 2016, p. 155). The systems interpenetrate and are connected with each other. At the same time, this means that factor deficits from one system can be counterbalanced by factor resources from the other system. Even a seemingly insignificant shift in a child's life, such as a change of parents' workplace, may have an impact on them, causing anxiety or uncertainty when choosing their own future career path. On the other hand, the factor from the exosystem (parents' workplace) can be balanced by a factor from the mesosystem (teachers, neighbors), e.g., when a young person strongly internalises the values passed on by the people from outside the family circle who have stable professional careers. It is also possible for them to cope with an emergency based on their own individual system (temperament, gender, health, coping with stress).

The chances of development in early adulthood are related to both the timely fulfilment of developmental tasks and the subjective perception of oneself in terms of an adult, as well as the ability to balance deficits from one system with resources from another system. The events of early adulthood are correlated with the fullness of life felt by a young person or the lack thereof (Smykowski, 2004, p. 51). The feeling of the fullness of life includes, among others: life vigour, intellectual efficiency, independence, creativity, self-realization, relationships with people (reciprocity of giving and taking), commitment, care for others. On the other hand, the lack of fullness of life occurs in situations of disappointment, distancing oneself, overload, lack of hope, conflict of roles. Especially the final aspect, i.e., role conflict is a threat to the successful development of early adulthood. It occurs when fulfilling the role of a partner / spouse, parent or employee is not adapted to the emotional level of a young adult, which is manifested in the rigidity of his attitudes and behaviours. Other risk factors of entering into adulthood include a lack of independence from others in terms of emotions and economics, extending the period of adolescence in fear of entering adulthood, the inability to change the relationship with parents to a less dependent one and transferring their feelings to another person (partner, child), but also the lack of social support in dealing with these issues (Wojciechowska, 2004, p. 53). Young adults prefer and create styles of relationships with others not based on intimacy understood in the Eriksonian sense, as in engaged relationships with peers, but rather ambivalent love relationships or a lack of them despite the ability to verbalise the need for closeness and reciprocity (pre-intimate style), relationships not based on closeness and depth (pseudo-intimate style), superficial relationships with peers and the lack of an intimate relationship with a significant other (stereotypical style), casual acquaintances and the lack of committed relationships with peers or with a partner (isolating style) (Wojciechowska, 2004, p. 54). Isolation, inflexibility, an superficial involvement or simply a lack of it indicate a risk of not passing the threshold of adulthood.

Brzezińska (2011, p. 70) mentions the extension of education and the necessity to allocate several years to career development allowing for relative stabilisation as the main reason for untimely taking on roles in early adulthood. For most young Poles, this stabilisation is associated with having a permanent job and own accommodation. In recent years, working adults have become precarious, i.e., employed on the basis of flexible civil law contracts (commonly referred to as 'junk contracts'). They do not give a feeling of security because they are concluded for a short period of time; they also lack any concessions and privileges that characterise employment contracts (holiday and parental leaves, sick leave, co-financing for employee holidays, etc.). These non-standard forms of employment differ from the usual in several important aspects. The first one concerns the duration of the contract – fixed-term contracts are used instead of an indefinite-term contract, which gives the employee a sense of security and stability. After the period specified in the contract, it is concluded for another period or terminated. The second aspect is related to the working time dimension – part-time work is offered instead of full-time work. Also, the way of performing duties is different than in the case of standard work – it is often characterised by work not performed under the direct supervision of the superior. It is possible in the case of another distinguishing feature of atypical contracts: a workplace that is not the company's seat (work from home, teleworking). According to Szaban (2013, p. 172), atypical contracts include all contracts called 'junk contracts' in Poland: from fixed-term contracts, through contracts for a trial period, seasonal contracts, self-employment and civil law contracts: contract work and contracts of mandate. Work based on the above-mentioned contracts carries risks in the form of uncertainty of the existence of the employee, the inability to plan both immediate and further activities, the implementation of which is necessary for financial stabilization. More and more Poles, referred to as precariat, find themselves in such a position. As Standing (2014, p. 13), the creator of the concept of 'precariat' notes, the term also means a lack of a permanent work-based identity.

The biggest problem faced by young adults defined as 'working poor' is their inability to earn a living. They mostly work in low-paid jobs in the service sector and this job is their only source of income. The vast majority of the working poor (as much as 63.1%) have a vocational education, less than 30% have secondary education, and 4.5% have a master's degree (Nowakowska, 2015). Importantly, the working poor are not synonymous with the precariat, as they have a fixed income (although low and insufficient to meet their needs), while the precariat is placed in the category of people with only temporary income (for a certain period of time - as long as the contract lasts). In such a situation, it is difficult not only to decide about yourself and to have a sense of agency, but also to plan any undertakings, not to mention retirement.

### LIFE SITUATION OF MILLENNIALS BASED ON RESEARCH

The aim of the pilot study was to recognise how people from the Y generation who work under civil law contracts perceive their life situation. The online study involved four people: two women and two men, aged 24 to 29, who attained secondary and higher education. The qualitative mini-interviews were conducted via Skype, with the use of a camera and a microphone. The questions for the respondents were: What is your typical day like? How do you perceive your professional and financial situation? What are your dreams and plans?

The respondents answered the first question as follows:

*I get up in the morning, eat something quickly and go to work. When I come back, I do shopping, usually something ready-to-eat that can be heated quickly in the microwave. We rent a studio apartment with my boyfriend, he doesn't earn a lot either. All in all, our parents add to the rental, otherwise we would not be able to do it (Woman 1, 27 years old, secondary education, works in a fast-food chain on a commission contract).*

*I start work at 9.00 am, but in fact I have to be there at 8.00 am to get the store ready before the mall opens. I also don't actually finish at 5.00 pm because I often leave an hour later or even later than that. You have to clean up, write reports, etc. I live with my parents. I study cosmetology extramurally, I hope that after that I will be able to find something better (Woman 2, 24 years old, secondary education, works in a clothing store in a shopping mall on a commission contract).*

*I have no permanent job. Two years ago I finished my studies, but it did not provide practical skills because it was art history. I thought that I would find myself in a gallery or museum, but you have to have connections everywhere, and I don't. I'm not too strong physically either (laughs). I was a postman for two months, I couldn't do it anymore ... Now I get some odd jobs here and there, recently I checked someone's bachelor thesis (laughs), the money from that was enough for me to buy a new shirt and pants, so that I would have enough to go to recruitment meetings (laughs). So, what is my day like? Can we skip to the next question? (Male 1, 29 years old, university education, part-time job, currently not working).*

*I don't have a fixed schedule because I don't have a permanent job. Sometimes I do translations and I give private lessons. I'm not a professional translator, so I don't earn a lot. Sometimes a nice event comes, but sometimes I browse the web all morning looking for work (Man 2, 25 years old, secondary education, works on the basis of specific contracts).*

The responses of the participants indicate that the workday of women employed in trade on the basis of a mandate contract does not differ from the day of work of a full-time employee, both in terms of working time and duties. However, the working days of the surveyed men who work part-time, do not have fixed working days and hours or income are different. The first group of respondents (women) therefore belongs to the category of 'working poor' with a fixed, though insufficient income, while the second (men) is in the category of 'precariat', i.e. people with unstable, temporary incomes.

Regarding the second question about the assessment of their own professional and financial situation, the respondents indicated that it was unsatisfactory for

them. The responses included phrases such as: *I work for a pittance; I work for junk contracts; I will never earn a loan for my own flat ; I wish I had left Poland; I can't afford many things ; I have not been on vacation in three years because I am not entitled to it and nobody would pay me for it; I don't have any motivation to work hard because you won't get a raise anyway, all that matters are connections; It's hard not to feel down when you finished your studies and all you can do is work in a supermarket.* One can hear regret, anger and frustration in these statements, which correlates with the results of the CBOS report (2013), which shows that one of the manifestations of a materialistic approach to life is the negative impact of low self-esteem, derived from having less than one's peers.

The question about dreams and plans reflected the basic living needs of the respondents, who answered: *I would like to have my own apartment; a salary that would allow for a decent living; finally move away from my parents' house; have something of my own; earn more; have a normal contract; not have to be on the lookout for more work all the time; have a steady job and peace of mind; be successful; start a family; not worry about the future all the time; have financial security; be able to help parents; travel the world; have money for a vacation abroad.*

The surveyed group of four Millennials identified the most important needs that could be met if they had a permanent job with satisfactory earnings. Stable employment is the most important factor in choosing a job for young Poles: in the report *Young Poles on the labor market* (2021), 77.5% of respondents said so, and for 74.2% the preferred form of contract was an employment contract. One person surveyed by me mentioned success, but did not specify how they understood it, although it can be assumed that it concerns professional success. For over a third of young Poles, this is associated with a job that is one's passion. Success is also measured by high earnings and combining work with traveling (*Young Poles on the labor market*, 2021). In the interviews, the respondents mentioned their dreams of traveling, but did not associate them directly with their professional work. There were also statements about dreams of a stable professional situation, which translates into the possibility of starting a family, helping parents, and securing one's future. This correlates with the results of the report *Millennials in SMEs. Under the microscope* (2017), in which more than half of the respondents associate professional success with ensuring material stability for their family.

## RESULTS

The conducted pilot study was an introduction to the planned research on the subjective feelings of young adults regarding their professional and life situation. Its results showed the feeling of dissatisfaction of people from generation Y due to unstable employment, fear of the anticipated future and their dreams, among which the priority was the desire to earn money allowing for a comfortable life. In the opinion of the respondents, a decent life is mainly related to employment on the basis of an employment contract with all its benefits. Young adults declared in the study that they work on the basis of civil law contracts, live with their par-

ents or rent a flat for which they are able to pay only with the financial support of their parents. One person was working and studying at the same time. As she indicated, graduating would allow her to improve her qualifications and obtain a job in the profession.

### CONCLUSIONS

Generation Y, consisting of the 'working poor' and the 'precarious' people, is a diverse group of people who share the need for financial independence to enable a life on their own. The respondents identified themselves as adults, which may be indicated by their plans and dreams. In the objective dimension of adulthood, however, they did not complete all developmental tasks accompanying this period of life, such as: graduation, leaving the family home, starting their own family and raising children. It can therefore be assumed that they are in the phase of "becoming adult" (Arnett, 2000), in which they are looking for a way to become adults by testing various possibilities, while maintaining the current status quo (living with parents, financial support from them, extended education). Therefore, it is difficult to ascribe to them the view that 'if someone has no money, it means that they are helpless' (CBOS, 2013), and in line with the above belief that 'it makes no sense to help people who cannot take care of themselves' (CBOS, 2013). One can only assume that they were uttered by young adults with a higher material status.

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