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# **DIFFERENCES IN RESILIENCE TO PROBLEMS OF WORK AT HOME IN FOUR COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This research at the adequate samples comprising of 408 respondents from Serbia, 201 from Montenegro, 221 from Northern Macedonia and 201 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the authors described psycho-social phenomena contributing to greater or lesser resilience in resolving problems, connected to work at/from home. In addition, differences and similarities among countries are examined and certain explanations on these differences are provided. The main conclusion is the psycho-social factors are connected with good resilience, which authors explain primarily as the fact that in social and economic context (great unemployment rate and insecure employment, low and insecure wages, poor exercise of social rights, undeveloped market, low level of consumerism, insufficient development of infrastructure regarding development of information and communication technologies, etc.) respondents feel socially privileged. Those privileges are perceived in professional autonomy, better wages, as well as better control and*

*planning of professional future. Among countries, there are significant differences; and the greatest differences are between respondents from Montenegro and all the others. Respondents from Montenegro estimate work at/from home significantly less favorable than all the others; they have less time for activities and hobbies, they can pay less attention to family and partner, and they find it more difficult to separate work from personal life, they show greater tension and anxiety in work, they sleep badly, and family and friends support them less than all the others. Jobs that are significantly below their professional education seem to be demotivating. Respondents from Northern Macedonia provided similar answers to these, whilst respondents from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina showed much more optimistic image. The authors explain these differences by specific anachronistic collective and psychological patterns, generating strong individual and group narcissism and decrease potentials for resilience to problems connected to work at/from home.*

**Keywords:** *resilience, work from home, similarities, differences, Balkan countries*

**JEL classification:** O57

## INTRODUCTION

Among negative psycho-social aspects of work at/from home the following is emphasized: bad mood, reduced social contacts, social isolation, exhaustion, anxiety, depression, burnout and suicidal thoughts, as well as numerous physical health disorders such are digestion problems, changes in appetite and weight, dermatological reactions, fatigue, cardiovascular disorders and diseases, muscular and skeletal disorders, headaches and other inexplicable pain [1], [2]. Researches also stress numerous psychosocial factors strengthening resilience to previously mentioned psychosocial problems such are greater autonomy and freedom in planning works and planning work process itself [3], greater efficiency in fulfillment of work tasks and greater self-confidence [4], [5], [6], [7], greater dedication to work [8], more balanced fulfillment of work and non-work obligations [9], and improvement of communication skills. It is considered that for successful conduct of work at/from home, the most important are flexible working hours [10], [11], systematic social support of family and manager and good balance between business and private life [12], [13].

This research shall primarily analyze psychosocial factors that impact strengthening or decrease in resilience, explained in the introductory part [14].

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The first objective is to describe protective psychosocial factors impacting strengthening of resilience and factors of risk decreasing resilience of those working from home.

The other objective is to point out differences among four countries of the Western Balkans, primarily regarding the risk factors, as well as protective factors.

## **SAMPLES**

The overall sample comprises of 1.031 respondent from the four countries of the Western Balkans: 201 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 201 from Montenegro, 221 from Northern Macedonia and 408 from Serbia. Samples are suitable because all those working from home who agreed to fill in electronic questioners are included in it. Due to the lack of representation, all generalization of the results to the general population of those working at/from home is unreliable and these may be used more like some kind of framework for some future research.

## **RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

Special questionnaire with answers with five-point Likert scale is prepared for research of psychosocial adjustability to work at/from home. Construction process was rather long and complex. At first, 200 statements were produced, and then eliminated in three rounds to 50. Afterwards, three independent experts reduced number of statements to 13. The third round entered only those statements in which all three experts agreed to be selected as those that in the best manner operationalize research problem. Responses to all 13 statements were provided in the form of five-point Likert scale, where 1 is the least and 5 the highest agreement with the statement. Hereby we provide review of all 13 statements.

1. Since I started my own business, I have significantly less time for myself and my hobbies.
2. Work at/from home does not prevent me to set sufficient time and motivation for physical activities (exercise / sport).
3. Work at/from home negatively impacted quantity and quality of sleep.
4. Since I work at/from home I pay less attention to family or partner.

5. Since I work at/from home I have more time to socialize with friends.
6. Work I currently do, fulfills me.
7. Current earnings I gain are sufficient to cover all my basic needs.
8. I am certain in future success of the work I currently do.
9. I have problems to separate work from private life.
10. I would like to have more contact with other people during my work.
11. Since I work at/from home I feel more tense and anxious.
12. My family and close friends mostly support me in my current work.
13. During the work at/from home, others (family, friends, neighbors) do not distract me and I may dedicate myself to my work.
14. Processing and analysis of data was conducted in SPSS program.  
Apart from descriptive statistics, we used ANOV.

## **RESULTS**

Items distribution at the Scale of psychosocial adjustability was shown so that the five-degree scale was set to three-degree one in order to perceive numerical differences among four countries more clearly.

**Table 1.** Distribution of items in Scale of psychosocial adjustability in four countries of the Western Balkans\*

Statements*	Bosnia and Herzegovina			Montenegro			Northern Macedonia			Serbia			Total:		
	No	I don't know	Yes	No	I don't know	Yes	No	I don't know	Yes	No	I don't know	Yes	No	I don't know	Yes
<b>1</b>	19,4	37,8	42,8	64,3	27,4	28,4	37,1	9,5	53,4	34,3	17,2	48,6	38,5	18,5	43,1
<b>2</b>	15,5	20,4	64,2	17,9	27,9	54,3	19	11,8	69,3	23,3	13,5	63,2	18,9	18,4	62,7
<b>3</b>	15,0	18,9	65,1	25,3	22,4	52,3	14,9	15,4	69,7	16,2	11,8	72,1	17,5	16	66,6
<b>4</b>	9,5	15,9	74,7	24,9	23,4	51,6	20,4	11,8	67,9	16,9	17,2	65,4	17,8	17	65,3
<b>5</b>	15,5	31,8	52,8	17,4	30,3	25,3	22,6	24	53,4	26	24,5	49,5	21,5	27	51,5
<b>6</b>	7,5	17,9	74,6	3,5	29,4	67,2	20,8	13,1	66,1	9	18,4	72,5	10,2	19,3	70,5
<b>7</b>	14,9	25,4	59,7	11	30,3	58,7	17,2	17,1	65,6	16,7	22,3	60,1	15,3	23,4	61,2
<b>8</b>	10	28,4	61,7	9,5	24,9	65,7	22,2	19	58,9	16,4	26,5	57,2	15	24,9	60,1
<b>9</b>	20,9	25,4	53,7	33,8	28,9	37,3	23,1	19,9	57,1	16,4	20,8	62,7	22,1	23,1	54,8
<b>10</b>	38,3	27,4	34,3	54,7	18,4	26,8	40,8	27,1	32,2	33,8	28,4	37,8	40,2	26	33,8
<b>11</b>	10	20,9	69,2	21,9	28,4	49,8	17,2	17,6	65,2	12,3	14,5	73,3	14,7	19,1	66,1
<b>12</b>	3,5	14,4	82,1	4	21,9	74,1	17,6	13,6	68,8	5,9	11,8	82,4	7,15	14,6	77,8
<b>13</b>	9,5	20,4	70,2	14,5	18,4	67,2	21,2	15,8	62,9	9,6	13,5	77	13	16,3	70,7

\*Numbers are expressed in percentages.

\*\* Order of statements by numbers is presented in the section on Instruments of Research.

It is particularly important to remind that negative statements in this scale are recoded. Table 1. shows that regarding responses to the first statement “Since I started my own business I have significantly less time for myself and my hobbies” there are significant differences among countries. We applied ANOV ( $F=9,881$ ;  $p=0,000$ ). Respondents from Montenegro, in fact, have the less time for their hobbies and activities than respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $I-J= -0,62189$ ,  $p=0,000$ ), respondents from Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,61165$ ,  $p=0,000$ ), and respondents from Serbia ( $I-J= -0,58224$ ,  $p=0,000$ ).

Regarding the second statement, “Work from home does not prevent me to have sufficient time and motivation for physical activity (exercise/sport)”, respondents from Montenegro provided negative answers more often than respondents from Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,3224$ ,  $p=0,012$ ), and those from Serbia less than those from Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,2159$ ,  $p=0,049$ ),

although this difference is at the borderline of significance. Among Serbia and Montenegro, no significant statistical differences were shown. It may be concluded that respondents from Montenegro, since working at/from home, have more problems and less motivation regarding physical activities than those in Northern Macedonia, and these are not significantly different to those from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to this regard.

Table 1. shows that respondents from Montenegro faced reduced sleep and poor quality of sleep due to work at/from home more, almost one forth (22.4%) stated that they had problems with their sleep. This was also confirmed by findings of ANOV ( $F=10,038$ ;  $p=0,000$ ). Respondents from Montenegro had significantly more problems with sleep due to work at/from home than those in Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $I-J= -0,35821$ ,  $p=0,004$ ) and those from Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,52509$ ,  $p=0,000$ ), as well as those from Serbia ( $I-J= -0,56940$ ,  $p=0,000$ , Table 1).

To the statement “Since I work from home, I pay less attention to family or partner”, respondents from Montenegro, in one forth of the responses, stated that they pay less attention to family or partner due to work at/from home (Table 1). These differences were confirmed by application of ANOV ( $F=8,234$ ;  $p=0,000$ ). Respondents from Montenegro, since they work from home, pay less attention to family and partner than those in Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $I-J= -0,60697$ ,  $p=0,000$ ), Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,35814$ ), and Serbia ( $I-J= -0,43638$ ).

Fifth statement, “Since I work at/from home I have more time to socialize with friends), does not show any statistically significant differences among countries ( $F=1,182$ ;  $p=0,316$ ). Table 1. shows that lack of time to socialize with friends due to work from home is reported in somewhat over half of the responses, and more than one quarter of respondents cannot estimate this precisely. However, it is noted that percentage of those respondents who do not think that due to work at/from home they have less time for friends is larger in Northern Macedonia and in Serbia, in particular, whilst this percentage is lower in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Montenegro. However, these differences do not reach the level of statistical importance therefore we should take them into consideration with mild tendencies.

The sixth statement, “Work I am currently doing fulfills me”, shows that respondents, in general, are content with their work at/from home. Percentage of those that are not content is shown in rather narrow borders as of 3.5% (Montenegro) to 9% (Serbia, see Table 1). The exception are only those respondents from Northern Macedonia, where the percentage of those that are not content with their work at/from home, goes by 20.8% (Table 1). ANOV also showed that respondents from Northern Macedonia are significantly less content

with current work at/from home than all the others ( $F=4,542$ ;  $p=0,004$ ), and they are less content with it than respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $I-J= -0,2982$ ,  $p=0,005$ ), Montenegro ( $I-J= -0,2683$ ,  $p=0,012$ ) and those from Serbia ( $I-J= -0,3220$ ,  $p=0,000$ ).

Three fifths of respondents in all four countries are either rather content or content with current wages, and the percentage of those that are not content is only about one sixth (Table 1). Similar to their satisfaction with work they do at/from home, the respondents are also satisfied with current wages they receive, although somewhat less (see Table 1). However, differences among countries regarding current wages are not at the level of statistical significance ( $F=0,122$ ;  $p=0,947$ ).

Respondents in all four countries are, in around three fifths of events, certain into future success of the work they are currently doing (Table 1). By applying ANOV among countries, no statistically significant differences were determined ( $F=2,463$ ;  $p=0,061$ ). However, it should be noted that respondents from Northern Macedonia seem to be the most skeptical ones towards the future success of the work they do, which may explain that value of F test in this particular event are close to the line of significance of 0,05.

Respondents from Montenegro, more than others, have problems to separate work from home from their personal life; one third of them stated that they have problems, while this is the problem to a lower extent in all the other countries (see Table 1). These relative differences are greatest when we examine Serbia, where the problem is present at half of this number of respondents (Table 1). Differences are statistically highly significant ( $F=14,023$ ;  $p=0,000$ ), compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $I-J= -0,48259$ ,  $p=0,000$ ), Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,46386$ ,  $p=0,000$ ) and Serbia ( $I-J= -0,73101$ ,  $p=0,000$ ).

Respondents from Montenegro, less than all the others, want to, during their work from home, have contacts with other people; it should be noted that more than one half of them did not express such desires (Table 1). Differences are statistically significant compared to the remaining three countries –Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $I-J= -0,35821$ ,  $p=0,000$ ), Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,32516$ ,  $p=0,015$ ) and Serbia ( $I-J= -0,50578$ ,  $p=0,000$ ).

Work from home causes the most tension and anxiety to respondents from Montenegro (Table 1). It is interesting to mention that respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the highest percentage stated that they do not feel tension and anxiety while working at home (around 70%), similar to those from Northern Macedonia, and the respondents in Serbia, in almost three fourths of events, did not show confusion and ambivalence of feelings regarding work at/from home. Differences are statistically significant when we examine Montenegro and

others, as well as among Serbia and Northern Macedonia ( $F=12,672$ ;  $p=0,000$ ). Respondents from Montenegro are significantly more tense and anxious during work at/from home than those from Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $I-J= -0,50746$ ,  $p=0,000$ ), Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,36402$ ,  $p=0,000$ ) and Serbia ( $I-J= -0,62533$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). Respondents from Serbia are less tense and anxious than those from Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,26131$ ,  $p=0,009$ ).

Family and friends supported respondents in their work at/from home in rather similar percentages, and relatively least support was provided by family and friends in Northern Macedonia, followed by those in Montenegro (see Table 1). Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina have biggest support in work from home than respondents in Northern Macedonia and Montenegro, and also respondents in Serbia compared to those from Northern Macedonia and Montenegro ( $F=10,718$ ;  $p=0,000$ ). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, respondents are significantly more supported by family and friends than those in Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,4053$ ,  $p=0,000$ ) and Montenegro ( $I-J= -0,2189$ ,  $p=0,033$ ). In Serbia, respondents are supported more than in Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,4495$ ,  $p=0,000$ ) and in Montenegro ( $I-J= -0,2631$ ,  $p=0,003$ ). Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia do not show mutual significant differences.

Finally, family and friends do not distract our respondents in their work from home and they enable respondents to dedicate themselves to work in large percentages – from over two fifths (Northern Macedonia) to over three fourths (Serbia, see Table 1). To this regard, the greatest similarity is between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the differences are still statistically significant ( $F=7,138$ ;  $p=0,000$ ). Family, friends and neighbors distract respondents from Serbia less than those from Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,4342$ ,  $p=0,000$ ) and those from Montenegro ( $I-J= -0,3029$ ,  $p=0,003$ ). Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina are also less distracted than those from Northern Macedonia ( $I-J= -0,025$ ,  $p=0,025$ ). There are no statistically significant differences between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In general, it may be concluded that our respondents in all four countries are satisfied with their work at/from home and earnings they gain, as well as positive estimates of the work in the future. Positive responses to these questions (6, 7 and 8) are between two thirds to three fourths (see Table 1). However, respondents from Northern Macedonia are less content with the work from home than all the others, although two thirds of the respondents from this country stated that they are satisfied with it. These results, undoubtedly, suggest that



there is sound psychosocial basis for achieving good resilience to negative psychological phenomena of the work from home. This finding is almost paradox one, if we have in mind a number of adverse circumstances regarding work at/from home by application of new information and communication technologies, such are:

1. relative underdevelopment of industrial activities, market and low level of consumerism;
2. relative underdevelopment of personnel and technical infrastructure for informational and communicational technologies;
3. poor healthcare, disability and pension insurance, especially regarding freelancers;
4. high level of unemployment or temporary and uncertain employment;
5. low and irregular earnings of employees.

All adverse circumstances to lower or higher extent are represented in all four countries. They explain the main reasons due to which those working at/from home are content with their work, in general. First of all, they have greater autonomy, better and more regular earnings and better control over their professional life and therefore more optimistic expectations in future. Due to all referred, especially freelancers, feel that they are privileged due to which they are content with their work, earnings and have greater expectations in the future. We are of the opinion that this is the key basis for construction of resilience to psychological problems of work at/from home.

Analysis of differences among countries show that apart from this common denominator of protective factors for strengthening resilience, there are also factors of risk to weaking of resilience that apart from more expressed negative conditions, stated at the beginning of this discussion, should be looked for in specific anachronic collective psychological patterns of certain countries of the Western Balkans. These differences are most prominent between Montenegro and other three countries. Respondents from Montenegro are significantly less resilient in physical, psychical and social functioning than respondents from the remaining three countries:

- They have poorer sleep quality (statement 3);
- They are tense and anxious more than others (statement 11);
- They have more problems to separate work from private life (statement 9);
- More than others, they avoid social contacts while they work at/from home (statement 10);
- They pay significantly less attention to family and partner (statement 4);
- Since they work from home, they have significantly less time for themselves and their hobbies than all the other respondents (statement 1).

It should also be stated that family and friends provide less support (statement 12) and they distract them more in their work from home (statement 13) than respondents in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. To this regard, there is no difference between respondents from Northern Macedonia.

Lesser resilience is the most similar to those of the respondents in Northern Macedonia, although among these are not expressed to that extent among respondents in Northern Macedonia. Respondents from Northern Macedonia are significantly less satisfied by the work than respondents from other countries. In addition, they express dissatisfaction with earnings and estimate of success of work at/from home in future than respondents from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while to this regard there is no significant difference from respondents from Montenegro. Also, respondents from Montenegro are less supported and distracted in work at/from home than respondents from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Finally, respondents from Serbia and those from Bosnia and Herzegovina are least different in all referred psychosocial factors of resilience, although respondents from Serbia in overall show somewhat greater resilience, but these differences do not have level of statistical significance.

Lesser resilience in Montenegro, and partially in Northern Macedonia, apart from all previously stated unfavorable factors is determined by poorer range of work from home dominated by small-scale trade and education of students. Latent dissatisfaction is greater in these two countries regarding higher educated people. Both activities imply great time consumption with rather low monetary compensation. However, in Montenegro there are also certain anachronic collective psychological patterns indirectly impacting reduction of resilience [15].

In Montenegro, in particular, there is emphasized idealization of both individual and collective I occurred as historical product of anachronical social and narcissistic patterns. Types and results of work from home in Montenegro do not affirm those idealized collective expectations, either regarding type of activity, earnings, professional affirmation of those employed at/from home. To this regard, situation is similar in Northern Macedonia as well. However, in Montenegro, due to emphasized individual and collective narcissistic patterns, conditioned by the culture and tradition, expectations, requests and pressure to those working at/from home are greater, due to which numerous neurotic patterns in behavior develop (poor quality of sleep, tension, anxiety, reduction of social contacts, impossibility of separating private and professional life, tendency to distance from family members in order to avoid criticism regarding insufficient success in work at/from home, etc.). Some of these phenomena are

present in Northern Macedonia as well, although to the significantly lesser extent. These common patterns of insufficient social connection with primary groups of respondents from Montenegro and Northern Macedonia are significantly different in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, family and friends support work from home than in Montenegro and Northern Macedonia, which is probably one of the key factors of greater resilience of those in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This regularity is confirmed by other researchers as well [16].

It is important to stress that same or similar cultural and psychological patterns may increase or reduce resilience, depending on if these patterns have positive or negative sign. Relatively highest resilience in Serbia is contributed by rather best infrastructure in information and communication technologies and adequate level of education, because Serbia, by development of freelancing, is positioned at the tenth place in the world.

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